

IS THERE A PLACE FOR ELITE FORCES IN  
THE CANADIAN ARMY?

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## ABSTRACT

IS THERE AS PLACE FOR ELITE FORCES IN THE CANADIAN ARMY, by LCol Frederick A. Lewis, Canadian Forces, 113 pages.

The purpose of this research was to determine whether there is a place for elite forces in the Canadian army. The genesis of the study is an observed disconnect between Canadian government expectations of a military capable of providing a wide range of policy options and an army conspicuous by its absence on the battlefields of the last decade. In times of need, especially when militarily weak, nations have often resorted to elite forces. In determining whether elite forces are a panacea for the Canadian army, a literature review developed a theoretical framework that emphasized patterns and gaps in existing knowledge and confirmed a definition of elite forces. A historical review of Canadian elite forces from 1900 determined the rationale for the maintenance of these types of troops in the Canadian army. In addition, a comparative study of five nations, similar to Canada, determined why these countries maintain elite forces. Finally, the study analyzed the policies of the Canadian government and attitudes of the Canadian people to the existence of elite forces in their army. The thesis concludes by recommending a structure that incorporates the advantages of elite forces as a way of improving the army's relevance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
THESIS APPROVAL PAGE .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
TABLES .....	v
ILLUSTRATION .....	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
3. HISTORY OF CANADIAN ARMY ELITES .....	37
4. LIKE NATIONS' ELITE FORCES .....	56
5. CANADIAN ATTITUDES .....	74
6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	88
REFERENCE LIST .....	106
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	111
CERTIFICATION FOR MMAS DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT .....	112

## TABLES

Table	Page
1. Comparison of Characteristics of Like Nations' to Canada.....	57
2. Summary of Like Nations' Support for Elite Forces.....	72

## ILLUSTRATION

Figure	Page
1. Hierarchy of Elite Forces .....	99

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The very mention of the idea of a military elite is enough to set the alarm bells ringing in sensitive democratic souls.

“Military” is bad enough, conjuring up visions of a separate caste of professional killers who glorify war, delight in gory heroics of the past, and eagerly await the earliest opportunity to test their skills in combat. Then attention is narrowed on a select group . . . who are particularly adept at doing its dirty business.

Martin Kitchen, *Elites in Military History*

#### Context

This study is written in the setting of an evolving, complex, and unpredictable world. The strategic environment of the last decade suggests that the future is almost impossible to predict with any certainty. In search of a valid context in which to place this specifically Canadian study, the Department of National Defence's *Strategy 2020* was the most useful basic work. Designed to provide a framework for defense planning and decision making, *Strategy 2020* admits to this difficulty in forecasting the future, but also concedes there are a number of continuing trends.

These trends are divided into four areas. Geopolitically, the world will continue to see ethnic unrest, religious extremism, resource disputes, rising importance of nonstate actors, and disparities between the developed and developing nations. *Strategy 2020* introduces the term revolution in strategic affairs to describe these changes in international behavior, hence the spectrum of security challenges, risks, and threats for which a nation must be prepared. Militarily, the battle space will be global in nature. Advanced weapon systems will proliferate widely among states, operations will be

conducted at an accelerated tempo, and rapid coordination will be required to achieve political and military objectives. Many emerging military threats will be asymmetric. The application of new technologies to warfare or, as it is often called, the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), is felt to have “fundamentally altered the character and conduct of military operations” (Department of National Defence 2001, Introduction). Further, socioeconomically, Canadians will be dependent on international trade and the global stability that allows the economy to flourish. Finally, *Strategy 2020* states that institutions that are adaptable and innovative and stress leadership over management will outperform organizations that are not.

### Expectations of the Canadian Forces

Against this backdrop it is important to understand what is expected of the Canadian Forces. The Canadian *1994 White Paper on Defence* demands a military response that is “flexible, realistic and affordable, one that provides the means to apply military force when Canadians consider it necessary to uphold Canadian values and vital security interests, at home and abroad” (Department of National Defence 1994, 8). This is further reinforced and even more sharply defined in the Canadian Army's capstone doctrinal manual Canadian Forces Publication 300 (CFP 300), *Canada's Army*. The Army is to be prepared to serve Canadian interests at home and abroad. It may promote these interests in a number of ways, but particularly by “giving the Government of Canada policy making flexibility by permitting it a wide range of options and responses in times of crisis. This includes the ability to project a resolute and authoritative presence to influence or resolve situations” (Department of National Defence 2001, 4).

To accomplish the above, the Canadian government has concluded that, “the maintenance of multi-purpose, combat capable forces” will “retain the necessary degree of flexibility and freedom of action when it comes to the defence of its interests and the projection of its values abroad” (Department of National Defence 1994, 13). This policy document goes on to discourage investment in very specific forces, whether at the high or low end of the spectrum. This multipurpose approach is nonetheless expected to “make a genuine contribution to a wide variety of domestic and international objectives” (Department of National Defence 1994, 13).

### Canadian Forces' Performance

“Multipurpose, combat capable,” was a useful construct when it was developed at the end of the Cold War. At the time, a Canadian lobby was calling for a military structured to only undertake peace operations. In essence, the Canadian Forces would have become a paramilitary organization. The fact that Canada has fought in three wars in the last ten years suggests that rejecting the constabulary path was the correct one. Nonetheless, in two of the three conflicts, the 1991 Gulf War and the 1999 Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, Canada's contribution was limited to only maritime and air assets. In the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, Canada's immediate commitment to Operation Enduring Freedom was once again naval and air forces.

Although the Canadian army has borne the brunt of peace operations during this period, the relevancy of its potential to fight alongside the best and against the best must be questioned. Faced with a possible crisis of relevance, it would seem appropriate that the Canadian army conduct the analysis and evaluation encouraged in the aforementioned



*Strategy 2020* with a view to confirming a military capability that has the right people, organization, equipment, and doctrine.

### Elite Panacea?

History has shown that when faced with crisis, particularly military weakness, governments and armies have often looked for the solution in the formation of so-called elite units. Rome's Praetorian Guards, Churchill's commandos, and John F. Kennedy's popularization of the Green Berets are but a few examples. Even though many military elites have been created in the crisis of the moment, the majority of scholarly works on the subject has nonetheless validated the utility of these forces.

Indeed Ion and Nelson's 1996 work, *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace*, not only declares the usefulness of elite forces throughout history, but also provides a statement that appears even more relevant to the Canadian situation.

As conventional military establishments are being reduced for a variety of reasons, and since conventional armies have proven largely incapable of succeeding in the recent low intensity conflicts in which guerrillas or terrorists have been the main enemy, it is appropriate to look at elite formations . . . [with] the many positive characteristics [that] can be applied to the needs of modern armies faced as they are with specialized challenges of the post-Cold War era with fewer soldiers and shrinking budgets. (1996, 1)

The above suggests the possibility that elite units may provide a solution to the problem thus far introduced. However, at outset of this study, it is critical to acknowledge the generally accepted dangers associated with military elites, particularly for democracies. The very nature of democracies presupposes all people are equal. Elite bestows special status, creating a stratum above others. When this elitism is in the realm of the military, the very existence of elite troops introduces the fear that the "guardians of the polity might turn against it" (Cohen 1978, 15). Concern over elite forces is not

restricted to the country's civilian masters, but also often resides within the top echelons of the military itself. This side of the debate, perhaps historically the most influential one, argues that the harmful effects of elites within an army outweigh the advantages. Most often cited is the drain of leadership and resources from regular units, which must inevitably supply elite forces with their best soldiers. Nonetheless, even if often under scrutiny from its own parent institution, elite units continue to exist in many democratic nations.

It is generally accepted that militaries in democracies reflect their societies. When not actually fighting a war, Canada would surely be categorized as a distinctly unmilitary nation. One of the wealthier nations on earth, it retains an armed force of only 60,000 personnel. In its most important alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Canada as a percentage of gross domestic product ranks only above Luxembourg in military spending. Perhaps the ultimate demonstration of Canada's sensitivity to things warlike, and elites in particular, was the so-called Somalia Affair. Embarrassed first by the disgraceful torture and murder of a sixteen-year-old Somali during the Canadian Airborne Regiment's United Task Force (UNITAF) peace enforcement mission and then the uncovering of disgusting, but unofficial, initiation rituals within the unit, the government disbanded this elite force in 1995. Given that this same government remains in power at the time of writing, despite any potential benefit, a key question that must be resolved is whether Canada could actually accept the establishment of purposefully elite military units.

## Thesis

Thus, this study has as its primary question, Is there a place for elite forces in the Canadian army? If the answer to this question is yes, the potential exists to not only provide a more useful tool of government policy, but perhaps also restore the army's questioned war-fighting relevance. The approach taken in answering the above question is that of proposing subquestions that address distinct areas within the subject.

Thus far the reader has been left to imagine what is meant by the term elite forces. Not only is a focused definition of this term needed, but there is also a requirement to understand more about elite military forces in democracies. Therefore the first of the secondary questions posed is, What are the relevant definitions and extant theories concerning military elites in democracies?

Historically, elite units have been allowed to exist within the Canadian order of battle. Today, even those not particularly aware of Canadian military history are cognizant of the joint American-Canadian 1st Special Service Force made famous in the movie *The Devil's Brigade*. This examination therefore needs to ask, What was the rationale for the apparent existence of elite forces in the Canadian army's past?

Although Canada is unique as a nation, there are others that are similar in many ways. Nations of like size, wealth, power, and interests possess elite units within their militaries. The Australians have maintained a parachute battalion and their Special Air Service (SAS) Regiment since the end of the Second World War and more recently have added two battalions of commandos. It would therefore seem appropriate to ask, Why do (or do not) nations like Canada maintain elite forces?

Clausewitz described civil military relations as a dynamic involving the people, the government, and the military. This paper has already introduced the possibility of what may be a sometimes-adversarial relationship between Canada's government and its military. This needs to be investigated further and is best done by posing the question, What really is the Canadian attitude and policy towards elite forces?

The introductory remarks of this chapter have suggested that there may be a need for elite forces due to the current strategic environment and existing trends. This view argues that current militaries appear unsuited for the types of missions that have been undertaken and those expected in the future. Although that may be true, can elite forces do any better? Therefore, the final secondary question asks, Does the current and future security environment indicate a need for the capabilities provided by elite forces?

### Operational Definitions of Key Terms

To ensure a common understanding throughout this paper, it is necessary to define the term elite forces. In other than hushed tones, the word elite is almost never spoken of within the Canadian army. Indeed, doctrine in the form of CFP 300, *Canada's Army*, uses the term elite once and at that, only in terms of a warning: "Equally serious is the potential for a rogue form of military ethos to arise which is divorced from responsibility and focused on erroneous concepts of elitism and honour, leading in turn to ill-discipline and breakdown of professional and ethical values" (Department of National Defence 1998, 36). This combined with *Webster's* definition of the word elite, "powerful minority group," and the term elitism "leadership or rule by an elite," would communicate powerful concerns.

Despite these warnings and the distinct possibility the word will raise hackles within the Canadian military establishment, the author has chosen to persevere with the term elite forces. In addition to this drawback, the term elite may even be seen as anachronistic or old fashioned, military professionals preferring to be more specific in their use of words to describe troops of this type. The use of unit names, like Delta, Green Berets, Special Air Service (SAS), *Grenschutzgruppe – 9* (GSG 9), and *Spetnaz*, or the slightly more generic labels, like special forces, airborne, commandos, and marines, are more common. In the final analysis, the use of elite is done for two reasons. Primarily, research indicates that all of the more scholarly works on the subject continue to use the term. Secondly, the term best captures the intent of the study, which is to consider all army units associated with the concept of elitism.

With the acceptance of the term elite forces, it remains necessary to develop an operational definition. Other authors have also placed priority on defining elite units early in their work. Dennis E. Showalter in his *German Army Elites in World Wars I and II* states, “If discussions of military elites have a common denominator, it is the challenge of establishing a working definition of elite” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 135).

A cursory look at the definitions developed by scholars in this area is useful prior to establishing a definitive definition. In what has been described as the preeminent work on elite forces and civil-military relations in a democracy, Eliot Cohen in *Commandos and Politicians* defines elite units using three criteria. First, these units are perpetually assigned special or unusual missions that are normally extremely hazardous. Secondly, elite units are small in size and its members must meet high standards of training and

physical fitness. Finally, a unit achieves elite stature when it attains a reputation, justified or not, for bravura and success (Cohen 1978, 17).

Roger Beaumont in *Military Elites* proposes nine categories of military elites: ceremonial, combat proven, praetorian (bodyguard), ethnic, politico-ideological, romanticist, technological, nihilistic, and functional. He concludes that the most common traits have been “voluntarism, special selection criteria and training, [and] distinctive clothing or insignia” (Beaumont 1974, 3).

Again referring to Showalter's work on the German army, he suggests that elite forces can be categorized as guardsman, warrior, or technician (Ion and Neilson 1996, 135). The guardsman he considers in the sense of escorts or bodyguards. The warrior definition is based on operational experience and reputation won on the field of battle. The third form, technicians, he identifies through their armaments, missions, and training, all of which are significantly different from the ordinary army. He does, however, caveat this by suggesting these categories are a model and not a straightjacket. In other words, each grouping is separated by “zones rather than lines” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 137). Interestingly, despite being a work on German elites, Showalter uses the example of the Canadian Corps between 1915 and 1918 as a “prime example” of how while maintaining a warrior status, the Canadian army also became technicians.

A final requirement for elite status is suggested in Lieutenant Colonel Bernd Horn's article, “Burn the Witch: A Case for Special Operations Forces.” He defines special operations forces (SOF) as “those organizations which are rapidly deployable in time of peace and war, and which contribute special skills and unique capabilities beyond the abilities of conventional units” (1999, 27). Although Horn looked at only one type of

elite unit--SOF (he admittedly cautions that SOF are not necessarily elite), he introduces the useful requirement to be immediately available for use.

It is tempting to simply define elite forces as all of the above. Distilling a concise definition from the preceding works is difficult, but necessary. This study uses the following characteristics to define elite units:

1. Composed of volunteers
2. Small in size
3. Undergo a selection criteria and training of a high standard
4. Armaments and equipment differ from conventional forces
5. Assigned special missions, often very hazardous, because of their unique capabilities
6. Immediately available for use and rapidly deployable

Of note is that the characteristic of having a reputation for “bravura and success” has not been included in the definition. As the purpose of this thesis is to determine whether elite forces have a place in the Canadian army, and thus is future oriented, the reputation aspect has little utility.

### Methodology

This study used a combination of historical review, comparative analysis, and survey research as a methodology. The literature review first developed a broad feel for the subject by looking at the few extant academic works, the Canadian army capstone doctrine, and finally other Canadian military officers' staff college papers.

The historical review used primarily secondary sources to answer the subordinate question, Given the apparent existence of elite forces in the Canadian Army's past, what

was the rationale for their existence? A combination of general textual histories of the Canadian army and specific articles on past Canadian elites provided the required information.

In researching the subordinate question, Why do (or do not) nations, like Canada, maintain elite forces? a comparative analysis technique, backed by interviews and surveys of officers from these nations, was used. National military strategy documents, so-called defense white papers, provided the basis of knowledge, which was then confirmed or expanded in personal interviews with the author.

It had been planned to determine “what the Canadian attitude and policy towards elite forces” was through existing surveys and government policy documents. This was done, but the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks and the subsequent War on Terrorism provided an even richer source of relevant material. Polls and government policy papers, drafted to deal with the situation, were published throughout the writing of this research. Finally in determining the Canadian attitude towards elite forces, the military bureaucracy's view was tested by interviewing very senior Canadian officers.

#### Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are defined as constraints that the author imposes on the scope or content of a study so that research is feasible. This study is first limited by consideration of essentially army-only elite forces. The Canadian Forces are an integrated armed force, and it might seem logical to include in the primary question, air force and navy elites. No doubt interesting analysis could be made of Canadian fighter pilots and submariners; however, time constraints and the length of this paper preclude all but army-elite units.



The use of the word “essentially” in the opening line of this paragraph is intentional. Analysis of Canada's counterterrorism force, Joint Task Force 2 (JTF 2), is considered essential. This unit's name alone connotes composition of more than just the army. Nonetheless, for all intents and purposes it is an army unit supported by a limited number of personnel from the other services. Secondly, the research is restricted by a historical time period. Many Canadians feel that, although Confederation came in 1867, it was not until the First World War that the country truly became a nation-state unto its own. In fact, if a defining event is identified, the Canadian army's capture of Vimy Ridge in 1915 is often the one chosen. This is significant to the scope of this study because it also likely defines when the Canadian army became a separate and distinct entity from its British forefather. As it is the Canadian aspect that is relevant to this study, historical research of the Canadian army will generally be limited to the period of World War I to the present.

Limitations of a study of this type are those weaknesses imposed by constraints or restrictions beyond the control of the researcher. The primary limitation imposed on this thesis is that of using only nonclassified source material. This is necessary due to the Canadian nature of the study, access to material, and availability of equipment support. Nonetheless, with the exception of a detailed discussion of counterterrorist capabilities, it is felt that the analysis is not significantly degraded.

### Summary

In summary, this study looks at whether there is a place for elite forces within the Canadian army. It does this in light of an apparent disconnect between Canadian government expectations of a military capable of providing a wide range of policy options, that make a genuine contribution, and an army that has been conspicuous by its

absence in combat operations. The study considers this problem as one that may only be exacerbated by the types of risks, threats, and challenges predicted by ongoing trends. Finally, the analysis is focused on the possibility of elite forces, ones described by Beaumont as “children of the storm” created by the pressure of events, as a possible solution (Beaumont 1975, 3). Although Samuel P. Huntington tells that the “serious literature on this phenomenon is almost non-existent,” Chapter 2 goes on to summarize the research that does exist.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the years, elite military units have attracted substantial attention, both positive and negative, from journalists, politicians, professional officers, and the public, but not from scholars. *The serious literature on this phenomenon is almost non-existent.* [emphasis mine] There is, in particular, a notable lack of systematic, comparative analyses, of this type of military formation.

Samuel P. Huntington, Foreword from *Commandos and Politicians*

#### General

Chapter 2 summarizes the relevant prior research on the subject of elite military forces, with particular emphasis on democracies and where possible the Canadian experience. Huntington's statement, written to introduce Eliot Cohen's *Commandos and Politicians*, suggests that serious research into the subject is limited. The much-changed strategic environment and intervening twenty years since that foreword was written has attracted more serious consideration and subsequently yielded a more substantial collection of works. This chapter identifies patterns in the extant knowledge and more importantly gaps. From these gaps, a foundation is established for new research and analysis. This literature review is divided into the categories of scholarly works, Canadian army doctrine and previous academic research.

#### Scholarly Works

Eliot Cohen's book, *Commandos and Politicians*, has been described as one of the most influential works on elite forces and civil-military relations in a democracy. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Cohen introduced the fear that a democracy could harbor

towards elite elements of its military. Specifically, he talked of “elite troops . . . contradict[ing] democratic ideals: to be elite after all, means being better than everyone else” and these “guardians of the polity” perhaps potentially turning against the government they represent (Cohen 1978, 15). Cohen declared the primary interest of his book to be the study of the interplay of politics and military affairs with respect to elite forces. In analyzing this he posed three questions. His first question asks, who creates these units and why? This thesis clearly must ask the same question from a Canadian perspective, and does so through research into the history of Canadian elite units. His second question acknowledges that there are negative aspects to elite forces and asks specifically, what are the political and military costs of having these units? His final question looks at how national character and security predicaments bear on this issue. He specifically investigated France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Israel. Appropriately this study must also consider the effect Canada’s national character and security requirements would have on the establishment or continuation of elite forces.

Given that Cohen’s work was a product of the Cold War, some of his conclusions could be considered dated. For example, his assertion that the time of elite light infantry has passed seems very questionable given their frequent use over the last decade. Nonetheless, he correctly predicted an age of terrorism that would emphasize smaller elite forces, like the German counterterrorism unit *Grenschutzgruppe 9* (GSG 9). Interestingly, he postulated that these types of units would present, from a civil-military relations point of view, fewer problems than their 1940 through 1960s elder cousins. This, he based on the relatively smaller numbers of personnel involved and on their desire to be secretive in their activities; these are units that would not be seen getting into

bar fights on Friday nights! The creation of Canada's version of GSG 9, Joint Task Force 2 (JTF 2), at essentially the same time the government had chosen to disband another elite unit, the Canadian Airborne Regiment, seems to add credence to Cohen's premise. He also concluded that civilian and military distrust of elite units has frequently been based on sound reasons, arguably the thinking of the Canadian government when it did remove the Airborne Regiment from the order of battle. He also predicted that elite units of Western countries would be more frequently used in the conflicts of developing nations. Canada's predisposition to be involved in exactly these types of international missions suggests some utility of elite forces. Finally, he cautioned that elite forces "offer politicians in democracies both a tool of policy and a source of fantasy. When elite units are used for purposes that are not really defensible in military terms, a number of effects harmful to military efficiency occur" (Cohen 1978, 100). This warning that elite forces can be squandered by their political leaders when they are not used for what they were designed would appear to be an appropriate warning for any final recommendations developed by this study.

The second most often cited scholarly work on the subject is Beaumont's book, *Military Elites*. Beaumont limited his study to military elite units formed since 1900, aiming to determine the real value of these forces, rather than the often-exaggerated contributions associated with their particular histories. He purposely challenged historians, social scientists, archivists, and military-political leaders by suggesting how weak the traditional rational base has been for establishing military elite units (Beaumont 1975, x). This was clearly a strong warning to anyone considering the creation of elite units. Like the previous author, Beaumont considered three main questions. He asked,

“Why did these units thrive in collectivization? How did they reflect or contradict the values of their parent systems? And how much did the corps d'elite match their creator's hopes and justify immunity from orthodox control and special access to resources?” (Beaumont 1975, 2). These questions are not considerably different from Cohen's, but are perhaps somewhat more specific and thus their investigation from a Canadian perspective could be expected to yield further clarity.

Beaumont's definition of elite forces was briefly discussed in Chapter 1. In his definitional discussions he introduced a number of observations that are useful. Like Cohen's optimistic remarks about counterterrorist elite units, Beaumont stated that those elite forces that had mental or technical functions, showed “less inclination to brawling, more cooperativeness and, generally less adolescent unease” (Beaumont 1975, 3). Any recommendations that Canadian military elites would be worthwhile might demand that this trait be an obligatory one. Beaumont's second observation was that elite units are children of the storm often created in crisis (retreat, defeat, and frustration) in response to an enemy strength, trying to make up for friendly deficiencies in military capability early in the hostilities (Beaumont 1975, 4). The aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks saw exactly this call for special forces to conduct a War on Terrorism. In Canada less than two months later, the popular press and political opposition parties called for the return of the Airborne Regiment. The more official *State of Readiness of the Canadian Forces: Response to the Terrorist Threat Report* recommended that JTF 2 be increased in size fourfold (Canada 2001, 13). Beaumont's final observation in his definitional discussions talked of intraorganizational tensions because of a preferential, real or perceived, access to resources and status. Included, as part of this tension, is the so-

called leadership drain, where elite forces rob their parent units of potential leaders. In this leadership discussion, Beaumont noted that senior commanders often resent the prima donna behavior often exhibited by elite forces. Any consideration of the establishment of elite units in the perennially resource-constrained Canadian army must be particularly sensitive to these issues.

In Beaumont's answer to his second question, he suggested that corps d'elite tell much about parent societies. Perhaps the paucity of elite units in the Canadian experience explains a great deal about the values of the country. He offered a number of additional questions in the consideration of this aspect of elites. He suggested that when looking at why elites were created it is necessary to ask, "Why are men attracted to join them? Is it privilege or status? Is it extra pay? Or is it a search for meaning in an age of facelessness?" (Beaumont 1975, 6). He speculated that to escape what could be the stifling atmosphere of military bureaucracies, or indeed, society as a whole, the young and adventurous may seek refuge in elite military units. This is an especially relevant consideration when volunteer militaries, like the Canadian Forces, face not infrequent recruiting crises.

As with Cohen, Beaumont discussed the dangers involved in creating military elites. He proposed that most modern corps d'elite were expected to behave "more like gangsters than soldiers." When this is considered in conjunction with his statement that "western nations, . . . [b]ecame less and less inclined to consider any dimension of military policy unless looked at in terms of defense or a rationale of preserving the peace," (Beaumont 1975, 190) a dilemma is created. This very succinctly seems to describe the Canadian attitude, perhaps best exemplified by Canada's military evolving in

name over the same period from the Canadian Armed Forces to the more benign Canadian Forces. As if further warning was necessary, like Cohen's guardians of the polity, Beaumont also suggested that corps d'elite could be the "seedbeds of reactionism," threatening democracy within the nation state itself (Beaumont 1975, 8).

In his concluding chapter, after considerable effort to warn the reader of the downsides of elite forces, Beaumont nonetheless predicted a growth of corps d'elite as low-intensity conflicts proliferate. This appears quite prophetic given that he was writing during the constrained Cold War period, replete with conflicts the likes of Vietnam, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. He also leaves the reader with a question, based on simple organizational theory, when he asks, "Since organizations tend to become stratified as they grow and persist . . . and as elitism is a function of organization should elites be encouraged?" (Beaumont 1975, 191). Clearly the Canadian army's cry of multipurpose, combat capable, suggests not.

The 1996 work *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace*, edited by Ion and Nelson, introduced a number of new themes in a compendium of works by different authors. As a more recent work, its conclusions may be more applicable to today's security environment. The editors began by declaring that elite military formations have played important roles in the military history of many countries. The book's stated purpose is one of investigating these formations over time and cultures. The relevance to this study and the Canadian army appeared immediately apparent in the following:

As conventional military establishments are being reduced for a variety of reasons, and since conventional armies have proven largely incapable of succeeding in the recent low intensity conflicts in which guerillas or terrorists have been the main enemy, it is appropriate to look at elite formations of the past. The example of these elite units as well as the many positive characteristics can



be applied to the needs of modern armies faced as they are with meeting the specialized military challenges of the post-Cold War era with fewer soldiers and shrinking budgets. (Ion and Nelson 1996, 1)

With this introduction, the book conceded that conventional wars are won by conventional armies, but questions whether there will be, but infrequently, conventional wars in the twenty-first century. Based on this prediction of future conflict, the editors suggested that small, highly trained forces might be more successful than large conventional military formations. Of perhaps more significance, they stated that when properly used, elite units can give even a small state “a deterrent power and military and political influence far in excess of that which the simple physical size of its armed forces might suggest” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 6). These introductory remarks, applicable to Canada in the sense of a shrinking defense budget, questioned relevance of a conventional army, and potential for more international influence, advocate significant utility to this study.

The first author in the Ion and Nelson book, Martin Kitchen, in his essay “Elites in Military History” divided elite forces into the three major categories of guardsman, warrior, and technician. Citing the example of the Roman army, before the creation of a Praetorian guard, Kitchen introduced the concept that within certain armies “there [has been] a sense in which each individual soldier was a hero, the entire army forming an elite” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 10). Rome was strong because of an insistence that all its legions be capable war-fighting organizations. This particular example emphasized the importance that military elites not become the only fighters within an army. The editors of the book offered that this can be “detected in some modern-day forces such as the Canadian army or the United States Marine Corps, whose relative size mitigates against

the creation of elites within its individual institutions and regiments” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 2). The image of an overweight-Canadian soldier in a service battalion laundry and bath platoon, might argue against this view. Nonetheless, the concept of a Canadian army recruited, trained, equipped, and employed as an elite is a option that would appear to have potential.

The concept of mystique was introduced by another of the contributing authors Douglas Porch, in his article “The French Foreign Legion: The Mystique of Elitism.” Porch's writing focused on the elite characteristic of reputation, real or perceived. Although Chapter 1 stated that because of the future scope of this thesis, reputation won in battle had no real definitional utility, it may play a role in attracting recruits. Another contributing author Dennis E. Showalter, in his “German Army Elites in World Wars I and II,” stated that mystique played an important role in attracting recruits into the elite formations of the German military in the Second World War. Given the Canadian Forces' current recruiting difficulties, it might be asked whether the creation of mountain, parachute, and commando brigades would not be found far more attractive to the “No Fear Generation Xers” than regiments holding some obscure relationship to British regiments of old.

Indeed, in referring back to “Elites in Military History,” Kitchen also asked, “Do ancient regiments with their proud traditions and continuing social exclusivity form an elite?” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 9). Kitchen's answer to this question was that: “Regimental snobbery with its elite regiments, based more on social exclusiveness than military worth, [is] a hopelessly archaic system” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 25). He further derided the regimental system when observing that during the Second World War it had

to be drastically modified when, “officers and men were posted to where they were needed, not kept within compartmentalized units such as regiments” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 26). The eradication of the regimental system within the Canadian army is an issue that is not addressed in this study. However, a modification, with a view to leveraging the positive aspects of military elitism, is one that is.

The possession of mechanization within the German army of World War II, inherent in the panzer, panzer grenadier, and *Waffen SchutzStaffel* (SS) formations may have become synonymous with elite to that army. Today's almost wholly mechanized Canadian army would be hard pressed to make a similar claim. Nonetheless, the army's current pursuit of a medium weight capability, essentially state-of-the-art light armor vehicles, might provide the opportunity to achieve an elite status of sorts, brigades optimized to undertake, not battles of attrition, but instead the challenging missions of covering forces, flank guards, and the like. Dennis Showalter's overview of the interwar years *Reichswehr* seems particularly applicable to the Canadian army. He described that Versailles Treaty-limited German army as one that had great success in both mobilizing and then fighting in the early years of World War II. He concluded that there are “advantages of a *quality army* [emphasis mine] in an age of mass warfare” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 147). Although Showalter declared the German panzer and panzer grenadier formations as that army's “premier technicians,” he also observed the fighting qualities of the *Gebirgs* or mountain troops and the paratroopers or *Fallschirmjagern*. In the later case, he notes that even with Hitler's refusal to undertake mass airborne operations after Crete, “The traditions established in the war's early years were deemed too valuable to lose” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 154). Even though later *Fallschirmjagern*

divisions had little in common with the paratroops that had assaulted Eban Emael at the start of the war; indeed, few were even jump qualified, this paratrooper mystique was leveraged throughout the remainder of the war. In all of the above cases the technicians became warriors in battle. In answer to the charge that elites often feel themselves above the law of armed conflict, the previously mentioned so-called gangsters, Showalter's research presented an argument to the contrary. In the words of a Herman Goring Division veteran, "It was a hard war, and the Herman Goring Division was a tough outfit. . . . But we were soldiers, not butchers" (Ion and Nelson 1996, 156). Showalter clearly felt this was an appropriate description of a warrior elite in most armies.

#### Canadian Army Doctrine

The Canadian army's capstone doctrinal manual is *CANADA'S ARMY: We Stand on Guard for Thee* (hereafter cited as CFP 300). The purpose of this document is stated as threefold: describe the army in all its aspects, show the army as a unique institution which reflects Canadian values and character within the framework of military professionalism and the requirements of war fighting, and establish the army's doctrinal foundation. This doctrine establishes an authoritative base for the consideration of elite units in the Canadian army.

The only use of the word elite in CFP 300 is in the foreboding warning that, "Equally serious is the potential for a rogue form of the military ethos to arise which is divorced from responsibility and focused on erroneous concepts of elitism and honour, leading in turn to ill-discipline and breakdown of professional and ethical values" (Department of National Defence 1998, 36). With this in mind, the manual emphasizes two major themes relevant to this study.

The first is civilian control of the military, embodied in a sense of responsibility to implement loyally and effectively decisions and policies of the government. The civil-military relationship is specifically described in CFP 300 as:

The place of the Canadian Forces in Canada will always be one of loyalty, subordination and obedience to the civil authority. While the advice and opinions of senior military commanders will play a key part in the formulation of defence policy, at the end of the day their job will be to execute policy. If commanders find themselves unable to carry out a policy because of grave moral or professional concerns, they will be entitled to request release from their obligations and to make their reasons known for doing so. Should events transpire whereby Canada is threatened or attacked by a foreign power, or peace, order and good government are challenged from within, members of the army will be expected to fulfil their duty to Canada in accordance with their sworn responsibilities and the professional values and expectations incumbent upon them. Ultimately, military outcomes are a shared responsibility between the Canadian Forces and the nation's political leaders, upon whose shoulders rest all aspects of Canada's security and well-being. (Department of National Defence 1998, 110)

Although the subjugation of the military is clear, it is interesting to note that the possibility of Canada being threatened from within is raised and that responsibility of defending against this is placed on members of the army. Again, this underscores that unit loyalty comes after that to the country. The final comments above, concerning Canada's security being a shared responsibility between military and political leaders, demands that the latter must also put aside party politics. This becomes particularly important where, as in the Canadian case, few government leaders and public servants have military experience or expertise in military affairs.

The second applicable theme is that, although a unique subset of Canadian society, there is a requirement for the army to be reflective of the fundamental values of the people. Borrowing from Samuel P. Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*, CFP 300 asserts that: "This concept of responsibility is what distinguishes professional armies in a

democracy, anchoring their value system and establishing the linkage between soldiers and their fellow citizens” (Department of National Defence 1998, 32). Both the preceding themes, taken together with the warning of erroneous concepts of elitism, indicate that military elites will tread perilous ground in Canada.

Given Kitchen's earlier negative view of the regimental system, it is appropriate that the Canadian army's official stance, as stated in CFP 300, be established:

Institutionally, Canada's army is organized on a corps/branch and regimental basis commonly known as the regimental system. This is a time-proven method of military organization whose antecedents date back to the Roman legions and even earlier. The regimental system is of critical importance to the army as it is within the regiment or branch that the military ethos is most visibly embodied and practiced. Its utility and value further lies in the strong sense of comradeship it fosters among members of a regiment and in its tribal/familial nature which bonds soldiers in devotion, loyalty and selflessness to each other, contributing powerfully to unit cohesion. Deriving from the regimental system of the British Army, the Canadian variant reflects Canadian values, history, geography, and the particular character of the Canadian soldier. The regimental system is most effective and valuable in wartime. In peacetime, it must be carefully managed to ensure that it does not assume greater importance than the corporate well-being of the army as a whole, nor unduly favour or prejudice individuals in lieu of merit. Regimental considerations must never be allowed to impinge on professional or operational requirements; nor should the regimental system be embraced in a way which might fragment or weaken the army's need for institutional cohesion. (Department of National Defence 1998, 43)

Of immediate note is CFP 300's assertion that the regimental system is of most value in wartime. Few would argue with the cohesion that is generated, but it interestingly conflicts with Kitchen's earlier statement that the replacement system has not historically been able to support the regimental system in war. Perhaps more important is the warning about misplaced loyalties, where the regiment might come before doing the right thing. If this warning is appropriate for regiments, it should be equally so for elite units. In fact at this stage of the research, it is evident that elite units and regiments have

similarities. It might even be asked whether elitism in the Canadian army already resides within its regiments.

The second Canadian army doctrine manual that is of use to this study is CFP 300-1, *Conduct of Land Operations - Operational Level Doctrine for the Canadian Army* (hereafter cited as CFP 300-1). The stated purpose of this document is to establish a doctrinal basis for the conduct of land operations, and in this it focuses on the operational level of war. Its references to special forces are those most appropriate to this study:

Special forces are troops selected, trained, equipped and organized . . . [to] extend the conflict in depth. . . . Their influence will often be out of proportion to the size of forces involved. The mere existence of a special forces threat can have a significant adverse impact on the enemy's morale. (Department of National Defence 1996, 5-6)

The simple mention of this type of unit, prepared to do reconnaissance behind enemy lines, conduct offensive action, work with indigenous populations, take part in combat search and rescue, and counterterrorism, confirms the Canadian doctrinal utility of special forces. JTF 2's primary focus on only the latter mission is thus somewhat surprising (Canada 2001, 13).

Although CFP 300-1 is not based on any particular force structure, its subordinate manual CFP 300-2, *Formation Tactics* (hereafter referred to as CFP 300-2), provides some insight into specific elite forces. Although no use of the word elite is made, elite forces are dealt with under the subjects of unique operations and operations in specific environments. The manual speaks of airborne and amphibious operations as unique and then addresses the specific environment of operations in mountains. Based on the definition of elite forces established for this study in Chapter 1, Showalter's earlier discussion of German army elites in World War II, and the historical precedent of these

types of forces, it is worth capturing the contribution CFP 300-2 states they have for tactical land operations.

Airborne forces are described as providing the commander with flexibility by virtue of their reach and responsiveness. “The very threat of their use may cause the enemy to earmark forces to counter the threat” (Department of National Defence 1997, 1-23). Actual full-time amphibious troops, modeled on the British Royal Marines or United States Marine Corps, are not mentioned, but reference to amphibious operations dictates that both the landing force and the naval force are to be trained, organized, and equipped for this type of operation. “The mere threat posed by the existence of powerful amphibious forces may induce the enemy to disperse his forces; this may in turn cause him to make expensive and wasteful efforts to defend” (Department of National Defence 1997, 1-23). Unlike the *Gebirgs* troops of the German army, Canadian doctrine implies that operations in mountainous terrain will be conducted by dismounted infantry, albeit units “properly prepared” and supported by helicopters if they are to be “decisive” (Department of National Defence 1997, 8-27). Clear throughout this discussion of unique operations and special environments (the purview of elite forces in many other armies) is that given sufficient preparation, the Canadian army can and will be expected to do them. As discussed later in this study, the performance of Canadian troops in the 1943 Dieppe raid, may argue against this.

### Previous Academic Research

Not surprisingly, Canadian military officers, for the most part while students at the Canadian Forces College, have provided significant literature on the subject of elite



forces. To put their contributions into perspective, they are reviewed in chronological order.

Major W. B. Gilmore wrote the earliest offering in 1977 entitled “The Airborne Reconnaissance Squadron.” He outlined the requirement for Canada to have a unit trained to British Special Air Service (SAS) standards of about company size, attached to the Canadian Airborne Regiment for administrative purposes, but directly responsible to the Canadian Forces Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (in essence the J3). Interestingly, he based his rationale for such a unit on a situation which still rings true today, one of “training suffering due to the weight of outside commitments” (Gilmore 1977, 38). He noted that Canada at the time was one of the few free world nations without such a force.

Major R. K. Morriss in his 1983 “Elite Military Forces - The Case for an Elite Canadian Special Forces Unit” considered the advantages and disadvantages of elite forces and concluded that the former outweigh the latter in the Canadian context. Predating the creation of JTF 2 by ten years, he envisaged the establishment of a relatively small special forces unit of no more than 500 personnel. Although his work focused only on special forces, he repeated the theme, already mentioned in this study, that military and political leaders must have not only a thorough understanding of the unit's capabilities, to ensure they are not misused, but also that civilian control be uncompromisingly clear and determined. Morriss introduced the relatively unique concept that elite forces can “provide popular symbols to sustain public morale in times of national crisis”(1983, 13). This potential to generate popular support amongst the people, perhaps including the recruitment aspect, is an area that this research paper addresses later.

In the 1984 “Airborne Forces - Are they still valid?” Major B. J. Doucet looked at the possibility of airborne forces being replaced by airmobile formations. He concluded that until a transport aircraft is introduced that combines strategic range with vertical takeoff and landing, there will be a requirement to retain both parachute and helicopter borne forces. He goes on to specifically state that: “Today's world situation dictates the requirement to retain an elite force, capable of being parachuted or air landed at short notice anywhere in the world to protect a country's interests in an environment short of declared war” (1984, 23). According to his paper, the Canadian Airborne Regiment was already under pressure in 1984. He was clairvoyant in foretelling of the demise of the regiment; his prediction that Canada's parachute capability would reside only in jump companies of the infantry's three regular regiments came true in 1995.

Major R. W. Trowhill provided another Cold War-scenario paper with his 1984 “Children of the Storm - Why Canada needs Military Elites.” The conclusions of this work suggested that Canada's army contribution to NATO, at the time a mechanized division, could have been effectively enhanced with augmentation by elite special forces. Although the situation bears little resemblance to that of today, his logic was based on several factors that are still relevant: “[They] would not require an inordinate amount of money to arm and equip . . . [and] would be able to deploy rapidly” (Trowhill 1988, 19). Of the many authors studied in this literature research, he is the only one to introduce the term, orthodox elite forces; this was found to be a useful description of the likes of parachute, mountain, and commando forces.

Although Major D. S. Higgins' 1990 work, “Canadian Society and Military Viability,” does not specifically deal with military elites, it provides useful background to

the fourth subordinate question of this research, that of Canadian civil-military relations. In discussing the concept of a mutual dependency between the military and its parent society (already introduced in this study's Chapter 1), he noted that Canadians are essentially ignorant of and ambivalent toward their armed forces. He included in this the politicians charged with control of the military. He suggested that the reality of politics, preoccupied with reelection, has had the "effect of leading successive governments to adopt 'knee jerk' reactions to the [military policy] decision making process while responding to the concerns of major interest groups and media exposure with [a] reactive vice directive approach" (Higgins 1990, 9). He concluded that civil-military relations within Canada are best improved by: informing the public about the military through the media; educating Canadian society about the realities of security and defense; and motivating and instilling pride within the military itself. If acceptance of elite forces in the Canadian army is desired, approaches similar to this merit further consideration.

Major Alan F. Stephen's 1991 paper, "Terrorism: The Canadian Forces Special Forces Commando," written when Canada's national counterterrorist capability resided for the most part in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Special Emergency Response Team, argued that this capability is more properly the domain of the military. Given that this fight was won in 1993, at first glance the paper might be considered to offer little to this study of elites. As the actual organization of the now established JTF 2 is classified, Stephen's discussion of the structure of a counterterrorism unit is enlightening. Of particular note are the connections he made between a counterterrorist unit's requirements and the previously mentioned orthodox elite units. Not only did he suggest that this unit should reside within the now defunct Canadian Airborne Regiment but also

that its proposed training subunit conduct counterterrorist and also parachute, water, and mountain training (Stephen 1991, 16). This link between a counterterrorist capability and the more orthodox military elite units is applicable to any recommendations on the overall establishment of elites in the Canadian army.

Major C. T. Russel's 1992 "The Precision Instrument: A Canadian Forces Special Operations Unit" was written as the Canadian government, as a result of rationalization of services and downsizing, reversed its earlier decision and moved the responsibility for counterterrorism to the Canadian forces. Russel recommended that in order for the country to fully benefit from this change in policy, "Canada should follow the lead of other nations with experienced special forces units, and expand the roles of its counter terrorist unit to include war tasks" (Russel 1992, 14). This initial look at other nations' experience would seem to confirm the natural link between various types of elite forces, either providing each other with personnel or as mutual support in operations. Russel's potential scenario of a hostage rescue operation outside of Canada, which would require both counterterrorist expertise and assault airborne or amphibious troops, amply demonstrated this. The actual taking of hostages at the Canadian embassy in Haiti and the more publicized Canadian peacekeepers held as human shields in Bosnia were two incidents that could have required this capability.

As this study has already indicated, marine or amphibious forces have the potential to fit the definition of elite troops. Although Canada does not have a marine corps, the papers of a number of Canadian Forces College officers have made cases for just such a capability. The title of Lieutenant-Commander K. E. Williams 1995 paper, "A Canadian Forces Marine Expeditionary Force - Its Time has Come," speaks for itself.

Williams underscored the emphasis placed on multipurpose combat forces, capable of rapid deployment anywhere in the world, implicit in the 1994 Canadian Defence White Paper. His solution was for the army and air force to transition to the equivalent of Marine Expeditionary Brigades, suitably supported by a navy with amphibious shipping (Williams 1995, 21).

Major G. K. Messenger provided an even more convincing case for such a force in his “Flexible, Capable and Relevant: An Amphibious Force for Canada.” He spoke briefly to the theme of elite in describing expeditionary forces as requiring a “mind set, culture, and a commitment to forces that are designed to operate forward and respond swiftly” (Messenger 1995, 3). Like others looking at elite forces, he also recognized a possible link between the various types of units, suggesting the compatibility of light infantry filling both amphibious and parachute roles simultaneously. Undoubtedly, his most significant conclusion is that Canada’s lack of quantity can only be made up for with quality if those very good soldiers can get there. Given the potential for strategic leverage implied in both of the above papers, further research into the requirement for elite forces in Canada needs to consider an amphibious capability.

In defining light forces to include airborne, air assault (air mobile), and amphibious units, used to conduct special purpose missions, such as reconnaissance in force, raids, and operations behind enemy lines, Major Colin G. Magee's 1995 paper, “Light Forces for Canada - Filling the Capability Gap,” became applicable to this study. He suggested that the Canadian army's heavy force structure prevents it from responding to all the missions, across the spectrum of conflict, assigned by the government. His solution is for light forces to fill that gap. He broached the concept of elite in declaring

that light fighters need to be fitter, more confident, independent, and more highly skilled than their heavy force counterparts. Interestingly, in discussing the training required to develop these characteristics, he stated that: “It does not require the forming of an ‘elite’ force, with all the negative connotations that accompany the term” (Magee 1995, 11). Magee provided this thesis with mixed signals: on the one hand, a stated requirement for seemingly elite-type forces, yet on the other, a clear message that they cannot be called elite.

Previous Canadian academic research into elite forces has not been restricted to professional officers at the Canadian Forces College. Illustrative of this is Dr. David A. Charters' 1984 study, entitled *Armed Force and Political Purpose*, in which he attempted to determine whether a valid requirement exists for an airborne unit or formation in the Canadian army. This extensive work introduced the subject by acknowledging that airborne forces have been the focus of controversy within the military profession for two reasons: their operational value and their image as elite troops (Charter 1984, 2). Although his study concentrated on the first source of controversy, he conceded that his work may provide clarification on understanding the second source of debate, elitism. It is in this aspect, particularly his discussion of “political purpose,” that Charters' study becomes worthwhile to this research; Chapter 5 looks at this area in greater depth.

Any work into elite forces from a Canadian perspective must involve Lieutenant Colonel B. Horn's research. At the time of writing, the commanding officer of an infantry battalion, he has successfully combined soldiering and academics as few serving officers in the Canadian army. Although focused on special forces, his recent article “Burn the Witch: A Case for Special Operations Forces,” provided a significant contribution to research into the wider subject dealt with in this thesis. As with other

authors he started with definitions, defining special operations forces (SOF) as “those organizations which are rapidly deployable in time of peace and war, and which contribute special skills and unique capabilities beyond the abilities of conventional units. SOF units are not necessarily elite” (Horn 1999, 27). Of note is the correlation between this definition and the one used in this study, particularly the need to be “immediately available for use and rapidly deployable.”

Horn underlines the Canadian sensitivity to elite units when he states, “The mere mention of elitism makes many in our egalitarian and hyper-politically correct society uncomfortable. Any suggestion that a unit is somehow 'elite' or 'special' frequently induces outside protest or even hostility” (Horn 1999, 26). He suggested this institutional bias contributes to a reluctance to discuss the importance of specialized or unique forces in the Canadian army, thus, giving credence to this particular study as a further source of discussion. As with Cohen's work, he reaffirmed that the resistance to elite units has been so virulent, that success in organizing SOF units from scratch has largely rested on the support and protection one could get from powerful political and military sponsors. Horn did not suggest who might be this sort of patron in the Canadian experience; this is an area that might appropriately be addressed in this research.

In the latter part of his paper, Horn considered the advantages of SOF. His rather obscure reference to the words of the British Deputy Director of Tactical Investigation in 1945, “When you are weak everywhere, forces of this nature [elite] are the most useful, and can play a most vital part in keeping the enemy all over the world occupied,” once again confirmed a pattern that establishment of elite forces is often a result of being vulnerable. The Canadian army will in peacetime always be small in numbers, if for no

other reason than the expense involved in paying and administering an all-volunteer professional army. This would suggest that if the Canadian establishment is to be swayed to elite forces as a potent option, it might lie in any potential economies. In this vein, Horn stated that: “SOF organizations and operations normally represent a relatively minor commitment of manpower and material. . . . Their appeal to frugal bureaucrats was evident. Savings were realized by replacing generic capability, backed with quantity, with specific skill sets reinforced by quality” (Horn 1999, 31). Although the specific forces that Horn considered in his article may be cheaper, this study needs to consider this aspect from a more broadly based, all-elite force, perspective.

As already introduced in this study, Horn concluded his article by questioning the relevance of the Canadian army. Although his commentary was written prior to 11 September 2001, he was farsighted in his assertion that for the army:

It is a choice between remaining relevant or becoming anachronistic. . . . A specialized capability, which offers an actual force that can be used for an alliance or coalition needs, will be far more welcome, and merit more recognition, than hollow assurances. (1999, 33)

### Summary

This chapter summarized the relevant prior research into the subject of elite forces in democracies, focusing to the extent possible, on Canadian experience. Although scholarly work on corps d'elite may have been limited a number of decades ago, this literature review suggests that since the end of the Cold War there has been somewhat of a renaissance. In 1996 Ion and Nelson clearly interested a significant number of scholars to write on the subject in their *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace*. In addition, it was evident that the subject has been addressed almost annually in papers at the



Canadian Forces College. Despite this attention by others, it was obvious that Canadian army doctrine continues to shy away from the concept of elitism, referring only to unique operations and operations in specific environments. Throughout the literature review, patterns or themes continued to reappear. Not surprisingly, the concern of maintaining corps d'elite in the supposedly classless, democratic society of Canada was forefront. Nonetheless, Canada has historically had its own elite units. The following chapter begins this study's analysis by examining the rationale for Canadian elite units in the past.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORY OF CANADIAN ARMY ELITE FORCES

For most of Canadian History, combat capability was not a phrase that could be applied to Canadian arms. There was no combat capability in the militia of the pre-Confederation period, and none in the militia or tiny navy of the pre-Great War period. In fact only during the Great War, the Second World War, and most of the Cold War years have the Canadian Forces had any military capability at all. Why? Because Canadians have always been reluctant to pay the costs to have a professional, well-trained and well-equipped military.

Jack L. Granastein, *National Post*

#### General

As Stanley states in *Canada's Soldier, 1604-1954*, the Canadian approach to defense has been one of a small regular force backed by an untrained militia. The regular army, known as the Permanent Force from 1883, was intended only to improve the efficiency of that militia. Regular soldiering in Canada has met opposition from the very earliest days of its inception, taxpayers not only questioning the need for financial outlays in the absence of any immediate threat, but “express[ing] fears that a body of professional soldiers might develop a military caste, from which the country had fortunately been free” (Stanley 1954, 248). It is with this background that the following chapter conducts a historical review of elite forces in the Canadian army. The analysis is focused at determining the rationale for their existence in the face of apparent resistance to things military in Canada.

## Pre-World War I

Although this thesis intentionally limits its study of the Canadian army to World War I and later, it does so only because it is from this point that the Canadian army began to develop a separate identity. It is nonetheless worth digressing to look at two earlier incidents that hint at the potential for elite units in the Canadian army. The first was Canada's little known support to the 1884-1885 Nile Expedition. In this famous campaign the British general Lord Wolseley was tasked to relieve Gordon at Khartoum. Based on Wolseley's earlier service in Canada, during what came to be known as the Red River Expedition of 1870, he asked for and got a force of voyageurs from Canada. The subsequent performance of these hardy woodsmen in the Sudan was described by Wolseley as “greatest possible value . . . conduct has been excellent. . . . They earned themselves a high reputation among troops up the Nile” (Stanley 1954, 271). Although they did not wear uniforms and were not in the proper sense a military contingent, they were very Canadian and met nearly all the attributes this study uses to define elite forces. They were volunteers, small in number, used different equipment, were assigned a special mission because of their unique capabilities, and were rapidly deployed.

The second incident of note occurred in 1909 at a special Imperial Defence Conference where the potential to leverage unique attributes of the Canadian soldier were perhaps lost just as the Canadian army was emerging in its modern form. Looking to improve the defense of the Empire, the aim at this conference had been to standardize military training, equipment, and doctrine throughout Britain's colonies. Although the advantages of military standardization are well understood, in hindsight, Stanley states that the Canadian soldier lost “not only his distinctive character but also the means of

developing those types of warfare for which he was especially suited for reasons of climate and geography. Winter training, cold weather equipment, mountain fighting, forest fighting, all of these could and should have been the special possession of the Canadian militiaman as they had been in the days of the *Ancien* Regime [French rule of Canada]” (1954, 304).

### World War I

If the aim of the special Imperial Defence Conference had been to turn Canadian militiamen into British *Tommies*, World War I was, if anything, to highlight the differences. Canada's Corps developed a reputation as “hard hitting shock troops” distinct from the masses of the British army (Stanley 1954, 318). This term, shock troops (borrowed from the German *sturmtruppen*), describes the first Canadian soldiers of the twentieth century who meet this study's definition of elite forces. In order to break the stalemate on the western front, the German army established assault battalions. In 1915 a German general staff officer by the name of Lieutenant-Colonel Max Bauer created the first of these units from pioneers (combat engineers in US Army parlance). They began by testing special weapons and techniques, then going on to conduct raids, spearhead other units' attacks, and provide training to select elements of the army. By 1917 over fifteen assault battalions were in the German order of battle. Although the original intent had been to reabsorb these units into the regular army, they remained separate. By the last year of the war, they and the divisions they had trained were considered largely responsible for the German army's initial victories in March of 1918 (Ion and Nelson 1996, 147).

So had the Canadian Corps become the allies' shock troops, elite like the German assault battalions? Although it is difficult to ascribe the term elite to a group as large as a corps, it may be reasonable if the sheer size of the allied armies is considered. Although the battle of Vimy Ridge has been cited earlier in this thesis as a defining moment for the Canadian army, it is by the later battles of the Somme, particularly Courcellette, that Stanley's work *Canada's Soldiers 1604-1954*, begins using verbiage associated with elite troops. "Canadians confirmed their reputation as hard hitting shock troops. . . . Lloyd George [wrote] the Canadians played a part of such distinction that henceforth they were marked out as storm troops; for the remainder of the war they were brought along to head the assault in one great battle after another. Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into line they were prepared for the worst" (Stanley 1954, 318). Some might consider this only the exaggerations of a diplomatic politician, but if any doubt remains as to the Corps' accomplishments, the following extract from *Canada's Army* should allay it:

During the final "100 Days," from the breakout at Amiens--the German's army's darkest day--to the entry into Mons on 11 November 1918, the Canadian Corps engaged and defeated 47 German divisions, nearly a quarter of the total German forces on the Western Front. (Department of National Defence 1998, 17)

The purpose of the above was not to establish bragging rights, but to emphasize that at the very beginning of the Canadian army's independent existence it was referred to as an elite. The rationale for this was not some contrived attempt by the army to create an elite, but simply the result of the country's demand that Canadians be employed as a whole (rather than be integrated throughout the British army) and, more importantly, its

performance on the battlefield. In essence, the Corps' success represents a model of Showalter's warrior elite.

## World War II

The interwar years provide little material for discussion of elites in the Canadian army. The numbered battalions that had been temporarily used during the First War reverted to their old regimental titles and soldiering returned to the purview of the Non-Permanent Militia. In a major reorganization of the army in 1936, the two existing guards regiments were consolidated into the Brigade of Canadian Guards. Was this an attempt to form one of Beaumont's praetorian or bodyguard elite? The definition of elite that this study uses suggests not. Nonetheless, the beginning of the Second World War revived memories of the reputation Canadians had developed in the previous one, and more tangible elite units were to be formed.

As this thesis has documented, elite military forces are often the product of military weakness. After being ejected from the European continent in 1940, this was precisely the circumstance in which Britain found itself. The well-known creation of Churchill's commandos is a point of departure for the investigation of Canadian army elites in that war. Two circumstances combined to create Canada's first elite force. The first was the desire of the British to recommence offensive action against the Germans. The second was the frustration of Canadian troops who had volunteered to fight and were not doing so. (As the Canadian Corps formed in the United Kingdom, its use in the Western Desert battles was denied to ensure a competent fighting force was prepared to defend the home front.) In February 1942, the acting commander of the Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General H. D. G. Crerar, wrote Montgomery, "In default of a reputation built

up in battle the Corps undoubtedly would receive great stimulus if, in the near future it succeeded in making a name for itself for its raiding activities--a reputation which, incidentally, it very definitely earned for itself in the last war” (Kerr 2000, 28).

Approval was given and in March 1942 a Canadian commando, known as Viking Force, was stood up. Drawn from the 2nd Division, this unit was essentially a scaled-down British commando of about 200 men, formed into a headquarters element and two troops. As volunteers, specially equipped, uniquely trained in mountaineering and amphibious operations, and intended for hazardous raiding missions, they met this study's definition of elite. The Viking Force trained hard, but before it was committed to battle, the Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) in the United Kingdom was tempted with something much larger.

By April 1942 Montgomery had agreed that Canadians would form the main force in the Dieppe raid. The soldiers of Viking Force were returned to their units to train two full brigades of the 2nd Division in exactly the skills they had been developing in their own training. The 4 June 1942 comments of General Crerar highlight a major shift in Canadian thinking.

Every formation of the Corps is thoroughly capable of taking part in the operations involving the landing on beaches in enemy occupation, and the rapid seizure and development of “bridgeheads.” There must be no need for the Canadian Corps to call upon outside, and special “Commando” units for assistance in initial beach-landing operation. (Kerr 2000, 33)

It is not the intent of this study to analyze Operation Jubilee, the raid on Dieppe. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the German 81st Corps, responsible for the defense of Dieppe, in its after-action report stated that: “Canadians had fought badly and

surrendered afterwards in swarms. On the other hand, the combat efficiency of the [British] Commandos [employed on either flank] was very high” (Stacey 1955, 392).

The rationale for this first Canadian attempt at elite units in the Second War stemmed initially from a valid requirement. Troops, meeting this study's definition of elite, were needed to conduct a special type of operation, felt critical at that juncture of the war. However, this rationale may have evolved to one of simply employing bored Canadian soldiers, in the greater number the better, so as to improve Canada's image. Although a warning of the dangers inherent in misuse of elite forces was introduced earlier in this study, the Dieppe operation underlines the folly of using conventional troops when elite forces are needed. Indeed Operation Jubilee's official lessons learned include the “necessity of forming permanent assault forces” (Stacey 1955, 401).

Whereas the Viking Force was nearly unknown, Canada's second elite unit of World War II quite literally achieved movie star status. The American-Canadian 1st Special Service Force was also organized in the dark days of 1942. Comprised of three regiments of two battalions each, Canadians comprised about 50 officers and 650 men or about one-third of the force. Again this corps d'elite met the characteristics required of this study. The Force, at least the Canadian portion of it, was recruited from volunteers and more specifically those in excellent physical shape, willing to undergo parachute training and with a preference, that seems somewhat comical now, for “lumberjacks, forest rangers, hunters, northwoodsmen, game wardens, prospectors and explorers” (Aldeman 1966, 48). Training not only specialized in parachute, mountain, and amphibious warfare, but also was conducted at a sufficiently grueling level, despite the initial selection process, that “one officer and 175 other ranks” were still returned to



Canada (Wyczynski 1999, 49). Although its original Norwegian mission was cancelled, its final mandate of November 1942 was elite in definition:

1. Operate against vital military and industrial targets. 2. Operate as an overland raiding force infiltrating, penetrating or encircling deep into enemy territory to destroy important targets. 3. Operate as a spearhead in forcing fortified localities with the expectation of early support from friendly troops. 4. Operate in cold or mountainous regions to accomplish any or all of the possible missions. (Wyczynski 1999, 51)

The command, control, and administration challenges this Force presented were likely all too obvious to the two governments, and certainly the two militaries, involved. One would imagine the rationale for the formation's existence falling into the too hard to do category. Nonetheless, when the 1st Special Service Force's commander, then Colonel Robert T. Frederick, first visited Canada in June 1942 to garner support for the initiative, he received “enthusiastic affirmatives from Canadian officials” (Aldeman 1966, 33). Later (because the Canadian government made no provisions for replacements), as Force operations unfolded in the Aleutians, North Africa, Italy, and France, “Canadians took such pride in the Force's accomplishments that it finally became a matter of national interest to restore the balance in the North American unit . . . [with] once again recruiting teams [touring] Canadian military establishments in order to secure qualified volunteers” (Aldeman 1966, 198).

Research does not provide any definitive statements on the rationale for Canadian acceptance of this elite unit, but some logical deductions are possible. Like the Viking Force and the Dieppe raiders, the 1st<sup>t</sup> Special Service Force offered an opportunity for Canada to contribute to the war effort early, and some might infer, in a high profile way. This is partially confirmed by the second-in-command's recruiting foray to Fort Benning,

when he said to potential candidates from the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, “I’ll guarantee the new unit will see action before this one does” (Wyczynski 1999, 49). The initial mission of the Force may also have contributed to the apparent whole-hearted support provided by the Canadian government. Even to politicians typically ignorant of military matters, the apparent niche of Canadians operating in the like climate and conditions of Norway may have seemed logical. In sum, despite what might have been overwhelming arguments against Canadian involvement in an elite formation, such as the 1st Special Service Force, under certain circumstances Canadian officials have clearly authorized elite units, even enthusiastically.

The Canadian element of the 1st Special Service Force had originally been designated the 2nd Canadian Parachute Battalion. Logically, there was also a 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion and analysis of Canada's only World War II parachute unit, provides a microcosm of Canada's relationship with military elites. The Canadian government authorized the establishment of a parachute battalion on Canada Day, 1 July 1942. By March of that year Canada possessed “a battalion of highly motivated and trained paratroopers, officially described as a *corps d'elite*” (Horn 1999, 36). On 18 March they were offered to the British and became a battalion in the 3rd Parachute Brigade, 6th Airborne Division. By the end of the war they had taken part in the Normandy landings, the Battle of the Bulge, and the Crossings of the Rhine. They departed 6th Airborne Division for Canada 31 May 1945, their reputation described as “an airborne unit second to none” (Harclerode 1990, 167).

Although the 1st Parachute Battalion's accomplishments were impressive at the tactical level, it is in studying the process of the unit's establishment that the most can be

learned. The idea of a Canadian parachute capability was first raised after observation of the utter efficiency with which the Germans executed their march across the Low Countries and capture of Norway. Colonel E. L. M. Burns, later to become Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, was to champion the cause. The military bureaucracy's arguments to Burn's first memorandum would be familiar to the officer of today. They criticized parachute troops for the excessive expenditure of time, money, and equipment that would be involved; the difficulty in administering them; and more importantly the inability of exercising national command (it automatically being assumed that they would be subsumed into a larger British formation). Burn's subsequent approach was again not unlike the strategies of more recent force planners, when he successfully argued the utility of airborne troops for the defense of Canada, militarily unlikely, but difficult for senior political-military leaders to ignore (Horn 1999, 31).

Although the war's next use of German *fallschirmjagern*, this time in Crete, and Britain's home defense arguments may have been the official rationale behind government approval for airborne troops, Horn's paper, "A Question of Relevance," suggests something far more likely. The British and Americans had by this time accepted the requirement for parachute troops and both had division-sized formations in existence. Horn proposes that the Canadian military had finally concluded, that to be accepted in the allied military community and thought of as "being a modern offensive minded army meant, rightly or wrongly, the possession of paratroops. Canada was now in the game" (Horn 1999, 36). The two-year debate over whether Canada should possess paratroops was an amazingly long process given the pressing demands of the war. The factors of usefulness (balanced against anticipated cost), national command and administration of a

relatively small unit, overemphasis of defense of Canada to civil leadership, and a simple desire to be seen as a professional army are themes that remain to this day relevant to the rationale for creation of Canadian elite units. With the war's end in May 1945, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion continued to exist only long enough for it to be returned to Canada and be demobilized. As of 30 September 1945, the Canadian army no longer possessed a parachute capability.

### Postwar

Broke and war weary, the Canadian government reduced the regular Canadian army from a wartime force of one-half million to a mere single brigade. Once again the intent was for the regular force cadre to train the militia, who would then do any future war fighting. Airborne training at the Canadian Parachute Training Centre in Shilo ceased the same month the war ended in Europe. With the permanent structure of the army established in 1947, the parachute-training center proposed the formation of a Canadian Special Air Service (SAS) Company. Despite the special forces image the name connoted, the proposal intended the unit to perform far more benign tasks: “1.) Tactical Research and Development (parachute related work and field craft skills); 2.) Airborne Firefighting; 3.) Air Search and Rescue; and 4.) Mobile Aid to the Civil Power (crowd control, first aid, military law)” (Horn 2001, 23).

By the time the Chief of the General Staff authorized the formation of the SAS Company in January 1948, the terms of reference for the unit had changed significantly to include, “provide a tactical parachute company for airborne training . . . and preserve and advance the techniques of SAS (commando) operations developed during WW II 1939-45” (Horn 2001, 24). It would appear that the techniques that Burns had used to

champion the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion were once again being used to convince a militarily naïve government and a conservative military leadership. If there had been any confusion in the role of the SAS Company, its first and only officer commanding, Captain Guy D'Artois, a veteran of the 1st Special Service Force, thought not. Organized into three platoons, each coming from the three remaining regular force infantry regiments, the Royal Canadian Regiment, the Royal 22nd Regiment and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, these paratroopers trained as a “specialized commando force . . . outstanding by all accounts” (Horn 2001, 25).

The formation of the next postwar elite formation led to the disbanding of the Canadian SAS Company. As early as 1946, the Canadian government had announced its intent that the army's only regular brigade would be airborne trained. As would become more common, it was government agreements with other nations that would provide justification for much of Canada's defense capability. This would later be exemplified best in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) requirements throughout the Cold War. The 1946 Canada-U.S. Basic Security Plan called for Canada to provide an airborne and air-transportable brigade for the defense of North America. Canada was to have an airborne battalion operationally ready by May 1949 and the remainder of the brigade four months later. The so-called Mobile Striking Force (MSF) was born. The soldiers of the SAS Company not only became the primary parachute instructors in the establishment of the MSF, devoting less and less time to their commando training, but the regimentally based platoons were to be subsequently absorbed back into their parent units. The demise of the SAS Company cannot be solely attributed to the MSF. The words of the then army Director of Military Training are worth noting, “I cannot agree

with what appears to be the present concepts of the SAS Company. . . . [T]hey are a luxury and it is very much doubted if they, in their true sense, can be recruited from our peace time armed forces” (Horn 2001, 28). Army hierarchy had not only reaffirmed its belief that elite forces were too expensive, but also showed a skepticism that truly special forces could actually be sustained by the small population base available in the Canadian army.

The creation of the MSF essentially transformed the entire regular Canadian army into an airborne and air transportable force. Ostensibly this brigade-sized formation was to be airlifted on short notice into the Canadian north to counter Soviet paratroopers seizing forward airfields for their bombers. Given that the units of the MSF were scattered in their garrisons across Canada and that the Royal Canadian Air Force did not possess the airlift capacity to deploy them quickly, the entire concept was of dubious value (Bercuson 1996, 168). The death knell of the MSF concept came with the requirement to raise a brigade group for the Korean conflict, another brigade for NATO service in Europe, and the development of Soviet capability to deliver nuclear weapons intercontinentally.

The initial rationale for the MSF was probably sound, even though in retrospect a little far fetched. Although its obsolescence should have been apparent as early as 1949, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) acquired its first nuclear weapons, the MSF continued to exist for nearly a decade. Although no factual data could be found to determine why, clearly there were subtle reasons for its continued existence. A likely reason might be inferred from the Israeli Defense Force. Although the Israeli army is, for the most part, heavily mechanized, all officers must be parachute qualified. Indeed the

U.S. army has similar predilections for training officers as parachutists and rangers far in excess of its needs. In all three cases, the armies had clearly decided that paratroopers were good soldiers and even if not employed in their primary role, were of overall benefit to the army.

By 1958 the MSF had been renamed the Defence of Canada Force and had been reduced to “jump companies,” one from the each of the three regular infantry regiments (Royal Canadian Regiment [RCR], Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry [PPCLI], and Royal 22nd Regiment [R22eR]). This would remain Canada's sole parachute capability for the next ten years. The Canadian army of today has now reverted to exactly this model; however, for the intervening twenty-seven years, airborne capability rested with the Canadian Airborne Regiment (CAR). In April 1966 Lieutenant-General Jean-Victor Allard, then the commander of the Canadian army and later the Chief of the Defence Staff, resurrected the idea of a formed airborne unit. He envisaged an all-volunteer unit that specialized in commando tactics in the spirit of the British SAS. Allard was concerned that the army's other brigades needed two months notice to be operationally ready. He wanted a “light and rapid airborne regiment . . . meant to 'fill the bill' between the time our government acceded the request for intervention from outside and the arrival of the main body of troops” (Bercuson 1996, 169). Allard intended the paratroopers to be physically tough, mentally sharp, and trained similarly to the elites of the American and British armies (mountain climbing, combat diving, demolition, long range patrolling and high altitude-low opening (HALO) parachuting) (Bercuson 1996, 171). The CAR's establishment went through a number of modifications in its twenty-eight-year history and although quite radical in its original design, settled to be most

comparable to an infantry battalion task force with an integral artillery battery and engineer squadron (company in U.S. army parlance).

Based on the advantages of the helicopter over the parachute, Bercuson's book on Canada's airborne, *The Pegasus Tradition*, suggests that the Airborne Regiment was obsolete from the day it was created. It is not the intent of this study to pursue the airmobile-airborne debate. Nonetheless, Bercuson's admission that he could only surmise why the Canadian army persevered with a parachute concept provides material worthy of further analysis. He proposed that the army's rationale included: an attempt to raise morale in the face of reducing and cutting a number of famous regiments (Canadian Guards, Black Watch, and the Queen's Own Rifles); the army's fixation on parachuting; provision of helicopters for an airmobile force being too expensive; examples of allied militaries responding to guerrilla warfare and counterterrorism with like establishments in the form of Green Berets and Sea Air Land commandos (SEALs) (at the time, there was terrorist activity in Quebec); and finally the "paratrooper was the essence of the combat-ready soldier . . . thought the best future leaders of the army" (Bercuson 1996, 176). All the above, less the fixation on parachuting, provide although not a full rationale for the creation and retention of the airborne, at least a partial one. Nonetheless, in a stand against the Soviets in Europe or the necessarily constrained Canadian actions on the fringe of both superpowers' empires, the essential operational rationale was not there in 1968. Evident from the contemporary operating environment introduced earlier in this study, the situation has changed even from Bercuson's relatively recent 1996 writing. The 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry task force's wait for strategic airlift to Afghanistan in January 2002 illustrated General Allard's concept of a



Canadian airborne capability to “fill the bill” between when the government agrees to commit troops and the arrival of the main body.

The Airborne Regiment no longer exists to provide Canada's land contribution to the War on Terrorism. Nonetheless, in its time it served with distinction in three United Nations deployments. Its first, with the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), coincided with the Turkish invasion of the island in July of 1974. An element of the regiment had been providing the Canadian battalion to the UNFICYP force as the attack began. Only three days later, after the request of the United Nations, the remainder of the regiment deployed as reinforcements, precisely the quick reaction role it had been intended to fill. Ironically, it would be the regiment's peace operation in Somalia, the United Nations Task Force (UNITAF), that would ensure the demise of the CAR. Rogue members of the regiment were to murder the sixteen-year-old Somali Shidane Abukar Arone and bait and shoot looters. It would be failures of leadership that were blamed for this in the eighteen-month nationally televised commission of inquiry. Despite a concentrated effort to fix the unit's leadership, after the airing of videotape showing degrading hazing rituals that had occurred a number of years before, the regiment was ordered to be disbanded on 23 January 1995 by the Minister of National Defence, David Collenette. The regimental colors, that included the battle honors of both the 1st Special Service Force and the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, were laid up two months later in a chapel at Canadian Forces Base Petewawa.

It is ironic that as the Canadian government was shutting down one corps d'elite, it was in the process of standing up an even more elite unit. Information on Joint Task Force 2 (JTF 2) has been closely guarded since its creation in 1993, but essentially the

unit replaced the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) as Canada's highest level of counterterrorist capability. Interestingly, the editor of the controversial *Esprit de Corps* magazine asserts that the majority of JTF 2 volunteered from paratroopers of the Canadian Airborne Regiment (*The Halifax Herald* [Halifax] 6 November 2001). The *State of Readiness of the Canadian Forces: Response to the Terrorist Threat (Interim Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs)* provides a valid source of information into the rationale for JTF 2. Compiled in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, this report confirms that JTF 2's role has been limited to dealing, in the main, with hostage taking and similar terrorist actions within Canada. The committee recommendations not only confirm the need for the unit's continued existence, but also call for an increase in size from about 250 personnel to perhaps over 1,000. Specifically, this would allow:

JTF 2 to increase its ability to deal with incidents within Canada while increasing its capacity to be deployed overseas and contribute to international efforts to blunt the ability of terrorists to carry out attacks. In the long run, JTF 2 could also serve as the basis for a special operations force which could broaden the ability of the Canadian Forces to contribute to national and international security. This is a matter which will require careful thought. In the meantime actions must be taken quickly to build upon the expertise and capabilities which exist now within JTF 2. (Canada 2001, 13)

JTF 2's creation, so close to the embarrassment of the Somalia Affair, suggests that if the need exists, elite military units can be established in Canada against significant opposition. The cynical observer might argue that switching from the RCMP's SERT to JTF 2 was done only for financial reasons, the Mounties being paid overtime while soldiers are not. However, it is more likely that this change was made because of SERT's inability to handle terrorist actions overseas. At the time, it was not uncommon for

Canadian peacekeepers to be held hostage in the former Yugoslavia. This makes further sense given the committee's recommendations for an expanded JTF 2, also capable of war roles (special reconnaissance, direct action, etc).

### Summary

Despite a reputation Canadian civil leaders have for ignorance in military affairs, they have time and again been supportive of elite units. A number of circumstances seem to assist in this regard. When faced with an immediate threat to Canada, civil leadership understands the primary requirement of a government to provide security to its citizens. The Canadian Airborne Regiment and JTF 2 both benefited from this. Enhancing the image of Canada on the world stage and thus of its politicians too provides a further basis upon which to rest the creation of elite units. Being seen as contributing to a larger international effort, with the inherent requirement to do so quickly, is also important. The 1st Special Service Force's origin, despite considerable arguments against it, is a case in point. Finally, from a civil leadership perspective, elite units that appear to fit a Canadian niche are more likely to receive support. Units that emphasized operations in northern climates provide a prime example.

The Canadian army itself has shown reluctance to embrace elite units. Nonetheless, it too can be convinced of the utility of these types of forces, given the right conditions. The simple fact that only elite troops can do a particular mission is important. However, there is a belief that the average Canadian soldier can do the job of other countries' elite. The 1st Canadian Corps in World War I demonstrated this, whereas Dieppe may have proven the opposite. A continuing theme, arising from always being the lesser partner in military coalitions, first with the British and now perhaps with the

U.S.A., is the desire of the army to be considered a competent, professional force at least equal to those it serves with. So-called getting into the game, as with Canada's various airborne organizations, has provided evidence of this. At times and under certain leaders, elites have been seen as a breeding ground for good morale, soldiers and leaders; the caveat always being that troops serving in elite forces would rotate back to regular units for the benefit of the entire army.

Overall, history indicates that elite units have not had an easy acceptance by either the Canadian civil or military leadership. Other nations, not unlike Canada, have seemingly had much less resistance to the establishment of corps d'elite within their ranks. The following chapter of this study looks at the experience of these nations.

## CHAPTER 4

### LIKE NATIONS' ELITE FORCES

But for its fighting spirit, no armed force is worth a fig. Over the last few decades, regular armed forces--including some of the largest and best--have repeatedly failed in numerous low intensity conflicts where they seemed to hold all the cards. This should have caused politicians, the military, and their academic advisers to take a profound new look at the nature of war in our time.

Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*

#### General

As the previous chapter demonstrated, elite forces in the Canadian army have not met with unabashed support by either the Canadian military or Canadian government. However, even on cursory inspection there are a significant number of elite forces maintained by other nations. Academics and military professionals have tended to focus on the elite forces of major powers. Consequently, the likes of the Green Berets, Sea Air Land commandos (SEALs), Special Air Service (SAS), Royal Marine commandos, French *paras*, Foreign Legion, and *Spetnaz* are well documented. The utility of drawing conclusions from a study of these major powers, often with a colonial past, would be of questionable value to a thesis investigating Canadian requirements.

Therefore, this portion of the thesis is directed at nations that maintain a stature in the world more like Canada's, so-called middle powers. Argentina, Australia, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden were chosen. The net was cast widely, to include fellow North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners, a nation with common British heritage, a neutral country, two that retain conscription, and nations from three other

continents. Although a diverse group, the similarities among them become apparent in table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Characteristics of Like Nations to Canada

	CANADA	ARGENTINA	AUSTRALIA	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	SWEDEN	AVERAGE
Population (million)	31.6	37.4	19.4	16.0	40.0	8.9	25.6
GDP (\$billion)	774.7	476	445.8	388.4	720.8	197	500.5
Budget (\$ billion)	126.1	44	94	134	105	133	106
Military Expenditure (\$ billion)	7.5	4.3	6.9	6.5	6.0	5.0	6.0
Military Expenditure % GDP	1.3	1.3	1.9	1.5	1.1	2.1	1.5

*Source:* CIA World Factbook 2001

Canada is one of the more populous nations in the group and, per person, the wealthiest. More importantly, although below average in terms of percentage of GDP spent on defense, it has the largest defense budget. The countries are similar in most categories, and certainly, Canada could not be considered at a disadvantage in its potential to generate competent national defense.

This chapter draws conclusions based on three questions with respect to each country. The first is simply to establish what each country has in terms of elite forces. Given the existence of these troops, government defense policy is then examined to determine the basis for their establishment. Finally, an analysis is conducted to determine the relative acceptance of these units by their countries' civil leadership,

military bureaucracy, and people. The last question is subjective and answered by interviewing army officers from each country. These included defense attaches (to the United States), liaison officers to the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center, and student officers attending the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

### Argentina

Argentina maintains both special and orthodox elite units. The former includes five company-sized organizations (Commando Company 601, Commando Company 602, Mountain Ranger Company 6, High Altitude Ranger Company 8, and Jungle Ranger Company 12). All of these units meet the full definition established for elite. These troops are tasked to conduct conventional and nonconventional operations, although specific restrictions are placed on internal security missions. In the latter, the nation's congressional and executive branches must first approve their use. That said, a 1989 terrorist attack showed that Argentina will use these elite troops in internal security operations when required. In this incident Commando Company 601 retook a military garrison that had been taken hostage in Buenos Aires. Argentina also maintains a significant number of more conventional elites. These include a parachute brigade, a mountain brigade, and an air assault battalion. In the case of the latter two, not all members are volunteers.

Argentinean army field manuals provide the grounds for establishment of these elite units. Although this might be considered unusual in some nations, as these doctrine manuals are written in accordance with defense laws and the constitution, they are considered government policy. In particular, army field manual *ROB 00-0, Instrumento Militar Terrestre* (Ground Military Instrument) outlines this policy, specifically

describing what units are to exist and the types of missions they are assigned (Argentina 1992, 44-72).

Argentina is now a republic with a fully democratic government. Civil control of the military is an accepted principle. Civil-military relations between the government and army elite forces are considered good. The Argentinean military uprisings of 1987-88 might be expected to have resulted in a lingering concern, especially given that elite-unit officers and noncommissioned officers took part. However, the Argentines saw these not as coups against the government, but only a reaction against the senior leadership in the military; the generally held belief is that there was no defiance of civil leadership. Apparently, even the government holds this view, and their attitude towards elite units is the more professional, the better (Vazquez 2002).

Commando and paratroop officers led the military rebellions of 1987-88 and senior leadership within the Argentinean army remains suspicious of elite units. The intentional separation of the commandos and rangers into companies rather than a formed battalion is commonly held as evidence that this concern remains. At lower levels, according to Argentina's liaison officer to the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Lieutenant Colonel Hernan Vazquez, conventional soldiers of the Argentinean army are comfortable with elite units, having only a "healthy envy of these units, if for no other reason than to obtain better equipment and training" (Vazquez 2002).

The people of Argentina celebrate the performance of their elite troops in the 1982 Malvinas or Falklands War. The special forces that captured Royal Marine Naval Detachment 8901 at Port Stanley and the marines that took South Georgia are a source of



significant pride. This positive relationship continues to be nurtured by the military in public displays of elite-unit equipment, uniforms, and capability.

In summary, the Argentinean army maintains a broad range of both special and orthodox elites, the existence of which is formalized in national policy. The country's elite units have demonstrated their effectiveness in actual operations. Civil leadership and the public recognize this utility. This support demonstrates a considerable confidence, given the Argentinean history with military juntas. Nonetheless, the most senior leadership in the military is reluctant to similarly embrace army elites. This study has already shown that when support is lacking in the senior ranks of the army, it is normally due to a belief that elite soldiers rob regular units of the best personnel and resources and may even have limited utility in the conflicts that are envisioned. These are valid military arguments, but they are not the basis of the Argentinean generals' concerns; their worries apparently rest only with the potential that elite units have to challenge their own authority. Given the support of the government, people, and the lower levels within the army, it might be expected that resistance to elite units in Argentina will decline as these generals retire.

### Australia

Of the three high readiness brigades the Australian Defence Force (ADF) maintains, no less than one-half of the regular infantry battalions in these formations meet the requirements to be elite. Of these six units, one is a parachute battalion and two are commando battalions. A further two, established as airmobile battalions, have many of the characteristics associated with elite status. In addition to the regular brigades, the

ADF maintains a Special Operations Group. This includes a 700-man SAS Regiment and the above-mentioned commando battalions.

According to David Horner in his *SAS: Phantoms of the Jungle: The history of the Australian Special Air Service*, the SAS Regiment maintains three *sabre* or fighting squadrons (companies in U.S. Army parlance). One “provides the Australian Defence Force CT [counterterrorist] capability and is purpose-designed for that role. The two-war role squadrons each consist of a headquarters, a free fall troop, a water operations troop and vehicle mounted troop” (Horner 1989, 452)

The basis for the establishment of elite units in the ADF can be found in Australian defense policy, specifically *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*. This strategic-level policy paper provides significant detail on how the army is to be used. The Third Brigade, based in Townsville, is tasked to provide a light, airmobile formation available for immediate deployment. The medium-weight First Brigade, based in Darwin, is to be prepared for more demanding contingencies, but remains deployable with an expanded amphibious lift capability. As is evident from the tasks just mentioned, defense policy places strong emphasis on the need to deploy quickly, the final characteristic established for elite status in this thesis. In addition, the Australian white paper repeatedly refers to the army's special forces capability, tasking the Special Operations Group with long-range reconnaissance, strike, and water-borne operations, and the SAS Regiment, in particular, with the national counterterrorist response.

*Defence 2000* portrays an Australian government more committed to their military than in the recent past. Defence Minister John Moore, in the preamble to the white paper, talks of “the most comprehensive process of ministerial-level decision-

making about Australian defence policy for many years” and “the most specific long-term defence funding commitment given by any Australian Government in over 25 years” (Australia 2000a, V-VI). Given that the defense policy actually tasks the army to maintain elite units, the government is unambiguous in its support of these types of troops.

Horner provides some insight into the army's and again the government's support of elite units. He states that “the government and the Chief of the Defence Force would be unlikely to authorise special forces operations unless they had confidence in the ability of the special forces and the maturity of its commanders” (Horner 1990, 458). Given this assertion, combined with Australia's apparent commitment of a full-war-role squadron of their SAS Regiment to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (*Toronto Star* [Toronto], 17 February 2002), it can be concluded that both the civil and military leadership of the country strongly support elite forces. That said, Horner's *SAS Phantoms of the Jungle* still recounts “a continuing battle for recognition within the Australian Army” (Horner 1990, 449). What has clearly changed is the expanded range of operations (other than conventional war) in the ADF's mandate.

Described as the Australian government's first serious effort to solicit public opinion on national security, the *Australian Perspectives on Defence: Report of the Community Consultation Teams September 2000* allows insight into the views held by Australians of the elite elements of their army. In general, the survey found the ADF to be held in high regard, with pride evident at Australian New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) memorial ceremonies and the military's recent accomplishments in East Timor. Nonetheless, the survey indicated that the public felt that the army still needed to

be more adequately structured, manned, and sustained. The statement that the public felt “a substantial Special Forces element should be maintained” probably allays any concern that the Australian people might have towards elite units (Australia 2000b, Summary of Key Findings).

In summary, Australia not only maintains a full range of elite units in its army, the percentage of elite versus regular troops is astonishingly high. The figures suggest an army that might even be considered elite in its entirety. Certainly the airmobile battalions, the army's single tank regiment, and its light-armored, vehicle-equipped cavalry units would not consider themselves any less elite than the paratroops and the commandos. The civil-military leadership not only supports elite units in its official defense policy, but the people have confirmed this in the government's own consultation process. Finally, and most convincing, the civil-military leadership has been willing to use them as an instrument of national policy in combat operations, operations viewed with considerable pride by many Australians.

### The Netherlands

The Dutch army's orthodox elite arguably exists in the guise of the 11 Airmobile Brigade, set up in 1993. It is advertised as a high readiness brigade prepared for rapid worldwide deployment. Forming part of NATO's Multinational Division, it is expected to operate with airmobile and parachute brigades from Germany, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. Members of the 11 Brigade undergo a red beret course of nineteen weeks, focused on the requirements of that formation's mission. A second orthodox elite also exists within the Royal Dutch Marines. This year, a third battalion will be added to the marine's amphibious brigade. Missions for this force include protection of NATO's

northern flank (as part of the United Kingdom-Netherlands Amphibious Landing Force) and the Netherlands Antilles.

The Dutch also maintain upper end special forces. The Commando Corps is described as an “elite corps of the infantry” (Netherlands 1998, 8), tasked to conduct special reconnaissance, direct action, military assistance (training and advice), and collateral activities (combat search and rescue, peace operations, and noncombatant evacuations). It has three active companies (104, 105, and 108) and a training-support subunit. The Commando Corps is responsible for counterterrorism outside of the Netherlands' territory. Counterterrorism within the country is tasked to a special support unit of the marines, *Bijzondere Bijstands Eenheid*. This delineation of responsibility in or out of the country may in reality be a superficial one, as both forces have operated jointly to capture persons indicted for war crimes in the former Yugoslavia (Duckers 2002).

The Netherlands *Defence White Paper 2000* clearly underlines a shift in security policy. Even though the army has been drastically downsized and conscription ended, the restructuring has aimed at increasing combat-ready strength. Statements like “not sponge off the efforts of other nations” and “a relatively limited number of countries are capable of 'exporting' stability” point to the Dutch desire to be capable of making a significant contribution to international peace, security, and stability. This policy is backed by a commitment to increase by 2,100 personnel the number of rapidly deployable combat-ready troops (Netherlands 2000, 2-3). Of the twelve infantry battalions available for rapid deployment, fully half are from the airmobile and marine brigades.

As might be expected in a country as liberal as Holland, the army endeavors to reflect Dutch society (Netherlands 1998, 5). One might anticipate that the army would be heavily weighed down by the so-called social experiments that often accompany this type of policy. This may be so, but the simple fact that the Netherlands is increasing its combat ready forces indicates that social experiments are being approached in a practical way. Overall, the *Defence White Paper 2000* considers both government and public support for the military to be strong when it states, “Over the past period, social and political support for Defence has markedly increased” (Netherlands 2000, 1).

In summary, if the assertions of Dutch security policy are to be believed, there has been a recent increase in both public and governmental support for improved defense capability in the areas of multispectrum, rapidly deployable combat forces. This commitment has been backed by a funded increase of 2,100 soldiers. Although not all of these troops will be allotted to elite units, all of the additional troops will be focused on out-of-area deployment. When this is added to the fact that over 50 percent of the Netherlands' active infantry capability falls into one of the categories of elite forces, it can be said with some certainty that there is significant support for these types of troops in Holland.

### Spain

Forty percent of the Spanish army's maneuver force, or a total of three brigades, can be defined as elite. The Spanish Legion, a brigade-size formation, has always been considered the elite of the army. This is primarily a holdover from the days of conscription, when the Legion was the only organization wholly composed of professional volunteers. Nonetheless, today it remains the premier formation in Spain's

Rapid Reaction Division and will routinely be the first to deploy (Bosnia, Kosovo, etc). The mountain and parachute brigades follow equally in the hierarchy of elites within the Spanish army. On a par with these formations is a marine brigade within the Spanish navy. Like the United States Marine Corps, it is one of the world's few amphibious forces capable of protected beach assault (i.e., using armored Landing Vehicle Tracked Personnel [LVTP] 7s). Finally, special forces are maintained both in the army's Special Operations Command and in the Marine Corps. The former consists of three special operation force (SOF) battalions, of two companies each.

Spanish defense policy, as enunciated in their *Defence White Paper 2000*, is clear in its demand for stratification within the army's organization, a characteristic that Beaumont stated in Chapter 2 results in elites. An ex-colonial power and a relatively new member of NATO, the armed forces of Spain are expected to “project their military potential far from home bases and act with maximum effectiveness in a wide range of operations scenarios” (Spain 2000, 79). To do this, the army clearly arrays the readiness of its forces in accordance with NATO's three tiers (reaction forces, main defense forces, and augmentation forces). As directed by what is called *Plan Norte*, the army is modernizing and lightening its structure to be more flexible, interoperable, and mobile.

Although the 1st Mechanised Division is being reequipped with state-of-the-art tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, at the top of the readiness pyramid is the Spanish Rapid Reaction Division. The latter division is composed in the main of the Legion and parachute brigades, an airmobile brigade of lesser status, and a special operations group. According to the Spanish *Defence White Paper 2000*, this requirement for fast deployment and readiness demands a “high and permanent level of training, maintenance

of effectiveness of materiel and the continual availability of the necessary levels of supplies” (Spain 2000, 158). Spanish force structure most certainly has had and has not.

Spain's present parliamentary monarchy was preceded by thirty-six years of General Francisco Franco's dictatorship. The Socialist Party government that immediately followed the Franco period, not only attempted to disband the Spanish Legion (Franco having been one of its founders), but also the army's SOF units. In both cases, senior army leaders thwarted these attempts. In an interview with the Spanish liaison officer to the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center, Lieutenant Colonel Jaime Iniguez explained that this apparent distrust of the military by its civil leadership changed with the army's involvement in peace operations (Iniguez 2002). The stature generated in the last ten years by peacekeeping missions has added to Spain's international image and by extension its politicians. As in the case of Argentina, the civil leadership has been convinced that the better the force, elite if necessary, the better for the country if it results in an improved international prestige.

Given that at least 50 percent of the army's maneuver force (FMA) can be categorized as elite, the senior military leadership has clearly accepted that these types of forces are advantageous. The lack of resentment of elites within the military is likely due to the recent ending of conscription in Spain. The army leaders' experience is that their best troops have always been volunteer, professional units (i.e., Spanish Legion). As the senior officers in the army have also always been professionals and an elite themselves, the concept of stratification in their military is well accepted. As the army becomes fully volunteer, where professionals exist in both paratroop units and the most mundane



service support organizations, it will be interesting to observe whether this remains the case.

In the aftermath of conscription, the Spanish armed forces consider recruitment one of their major challenges (Spain 2000, 111). It is evident in the following extract that there is general disinterest in matters of defense:

To convey to Spanish society the need to invest in defense, as there is no alternative to this public asset.

To arouse the public's interest in defense issues, raising as far as possible their level of information and always applying criteria of maximum transparency.

To encourage Spanish society to identify with the effort being made in defense, with the conviction that the work carried out is heading in the right direction (Spain 2000, 75).

In the Iniguez interview, he argues that this indifference may be changing and that the Spanish youth and their parents might already be more inclined to consider not only a career in the military, but also one in high profile units, like the orthodox and special elites.

In summary, the Spanish military maintains a considerable array of elite forces. Their defense policy clearly states the criticality of possessing forces falling into the elite category. In addition to demanding flexibility in employment, particular emphasis is placed on immediate readiness and rapid deployability. The current military leadership would appear to strongly support the existence of elite units. Primarily through the increased influence of Spanish peacekeepers (almost always drawn initially from the army's elite formations), politicians have come to understand the importance of these types of forces. The people of Spain have likely yet to make up their minds in this area, but at worst case they remain benignly uninterested.

## Sweden

Sweden remains one of the West's few countries to maintain national conscription. All citizens between the ages of seventeen and seventy are liable for so-called Total Defense. Even with conscription, the Swedish army maintains elite units of special and orthodox categories. Bending the requirement for being a volunteer provides an opportunity to look at this type of unit from the perspective of a nation that remains committed to universal service.

Of the Swedish army's thirty-four battalions, approximately one-third might be considered elite. Of this number two parachute battalions are maintained. These units are considered by the Swedish Military Attaché to the United States Colonel Sverker Goranson to be "airborne plus," meaning they are more like U.S. Army rangers than regular paratroops. In addition, four specially trained mountain battalions are focused on northern operations. In the last year, an amphibious brigade of three battalions has also been created, although it will not be fully equipped prior to 2005. Also recently, yet to be completed is the establishment of an air assault battalion (previously a unit with ranger nomenclature).

In all of these units, the basic soldier undergoes no more than one year of training and in many cases less. Whether these units are actually elite, in comparison with other like units in fully volunteer and professional armies, could be questioned. It is not so much the level of competence that is important, but the simple fact that in a democratic, conscript army, there has been an attempt to have elite units. Information on special forces within Sweden is classified. Nonetheless, Goranson was able to report that as of January 2002, Swedish all-volunteer, special operations troops had deployed to

Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. In addition, he offered that the Swedish forces maintain an all-officer counterterrorist unit (Goranson 2002).

Traditional defense policy of this neutral nation has focused on countering threats that directly affect Sweden's peace and independence. However, as with other countries, Sweden is redefining its views on security. More and more it is looking internationally, in collaboration with other states, to work for peace and increased security (Sweden 2000, 4). As such, it has stood up a rapid reaction force of battalion size, with one company at thirty days notice to move and the remainder at ninety days. The concept is that as this battalion is deployed, a second one is created. These units are presently equipped as mechanized units.

When Colonel Goranson was asked if the Swedish government feared military elite units, his response was “absolutely.” He further emphasized that the army was expected to mirror the “democratic” nature of Swedish society. The concept of a soldier being a citizen but with different personal expectations and additional responsibilities placed on him by the state was not the Swedish way. Units with elite nomenclature have existed within the Swedish army for some time, but in the main, have been conscripts like other units, perhaps viewed as in Canadian doctrine as operating in unique operations and special environments. The attaché did say that attitudes of the government were changing, and like other nations, it was because of the international leverage available to a country that could contribute quickly to international peace and security, something politicians understood to require high readiness troops.

Colonel Goranson further stated that the Swedish army was comfortable with units being identified as more elite than others. Those that were better tended to be so

because they had more extensive training; apparently the regular conscript was relatively happy simply doing his term of service and then getting out. According to Goranson, senior military leaders were mature enough to understand the requirement for higher readiness units, perhaps called elite, if the demands being placed on them for overseas deployment were to be met. Given that the vast majority of the public, at least male, has served in the military, overall civil-military relations are good. Goranson did note that the more elite units of the army had yet to produce any “bad news” stories in the press. He felt that acceptance of elite forces would suffer if soldiers of these special units were to be involved in incidents outside the “limits of civility” or were to “behave more like gangsters than soldiers” (Beaumont 1974, 7).

In summary, Sweden has and continues to maintain elite military units within the constraints of a conscript system. Indeed, for a neutral nation, it has made the extraordinary leap of projecting power in other than United Nations Chapter VI peacekeeping missions; its contributions to peace enforcement in Kosovo (KFOR) and special operations in Afghanistan being cases in point. The recent establishment of an amphibious brigade, ostensibly to operate in the Swedish archipelago, but equally useful for missions abroad, indicates to this author a paradigm shift in national policy. Attitudes are changing with a more substantive stratification in terms of readiness within the army, a pragmatic acceptance from the government, and to date no opposition from people accustomed to a form of democracy that shuns any form of elitism.

### Summary

Table 2 summarizes the data presented throughout the chapter. It is apparent that despite the nations being different in many respects, they all maintain both orthodox elite

units and special forces, some in very high proportion. Government support for elite units is present in all the nations. This support seemed to emanate from the potential these forces provide to do the government's bidding. If these units also make the nation and by extension the politicians themselves look good on the international stage, so much the better. The table is, however, cautious in its categorization of both Spain and Sweden. The classification of the Spanish government's support as "partial" is based more on the author's conservatism than perhaps the actual views held in Spain. This is based on the concerns that surrounded the government's attempt to disband both the Legion and the special forces less than a generation ago. Even though the Swedish government clearly condones elites, the military attaché's warning that the government would have zero tolerance for any exhibition of rogue elitism has caused the author to again err on the careful side and categorize Swedish government support as one of "concern."

Table 2. Summary of Like Nations' Support for Elite Forces

COUNTRY	SPECIAL ELITES	ORTHODOX ELITES	GOVERNMENT SUPPORT	MILITARY SUPPORT	PUBLIC SUPPORT
Argentina	✓	✓	●	○	●
Australia	✓	✓	●	●	●
Netherlands	✓	✓	●	●	●
Spain	✓	✓	○	●	●
Sweden	✓	✓	○	●	●

- Support
- Partial Support
- Concern

Military and public support for elite forces is nearly unanimous amongst this group of nations' military and public. Although military support was ascertained relatively accurately from military policy and doctrine, determining the attitudes of the

people was far more subjective. In terms of the militaries, only Argentina exhibited any reluctance towards elite units. Even in this case, it was only with the most senior leaders, who had experienced a military revolt against themselves, that this attitude remained. If any conclusions can be drawn from the apparent support of these countries' people, it is that as long as elite forces behave themselves, the more special a unit comes across, the more pride the country seems to have in it.

The research in this chapter overwhelmingly demonstrates that nations like Canada not only possess a full range of elite forces, but also do so with wide ranging support. Nonetheless, to the casual observer and perhaps even the professional army officer, there appears significant reluctance to do so in Canada. Chapter 5 goes on to investigate the attitudes of the government, military and public towards the existence of elite units in the Canadian army.

## CHAPTER 5

### CANADIAN ATTITUDES

As Carl von Clausewitz wrote in his famous *Vom Krieg* (On War), people, armed forces, and government must be in tune and in balance lest the business of raising and training armies - and undertaking operations - becomes something removed from, and disconnected with, the daily lives of the people. *That disconnection has certainly become the rule in Canada* [emphasis mine].

David Bercuson, *Bercuson Report* 1997

#### General

Samuel P. Huntington provided a methodology for the study of civil-military relations in western democracies in his 1957 work, *Soldier and the State*. His theoretical framework is instructive in examining the attitudes of Canada's government, public, and military towards elite forces. He tells that on an institutional level the objective of a nation's military security policy should be “to develop a system of civil-military relations which maximize military security at the least sacrifice of other social values” (Huntington 1958, 2). In concert with this, not only does the Canadian military historian David Bercuson think that civil-military relations in Canada are broken (note the chapter's opening quote), but he also declares that this aspect is so important that the measure of the Canadian Forces, in the long run, will be “how closely it comes to reflect the values and ideals of Canadian society” (Bercuson 1997). Another Canadian historian, Desmond Morton, is even more cynical in declaring that “[in] most countries in the western hemisphere, the national army's most likely enemy is its own people” (Morton 1997). Given the above statements and an apparent Canadian sensitivity to things warlike, this

part of the study looks at the parameters of Canadian government, public, and military acceptance of elite forces.

### The Government

The Canadian government's attitude towards its armed forces is probably best described by columnist Hugh Winsor as, “skeptical at best . . . generally uninterested . . . [and] would rather spend scarce dollars elsewhere” (*The Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 25 February 2002). Not only is the Canadian political leadership generally felt to be uninterested in the military, but also when engaged, unsure of what it wants its military to do. In the weeks prior to the actual commitment of conventional ground troops in Afghanistan, Prime Minister Jean Chretien illustrated this phenomenon. Although his words, “[We] don't want to have a big fight there. We want to bring peace and happiness as much as possible” appear hesitant and almost infantile, nonetheless they resonate with the sentiment of many Canadians, “who see themselves and their military as peace makers rather than war makers” (*Times Colonist* [Victoria], 25 November 2001).

The prime minister's rather awkward words illustrate what many modern-day Canadian politicians expect from their military--image, prestige, and leverage on the international stage. The government's experience is that the Canadian Forces, particularly the army, achieves this through peacekeeping. The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks changed this paradigm. In a period that spanned only weeks, the government withdrew its offer to take part in the United Nation's mandated International Stabilization Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, a peace operation, in favor of one that contributed troops to actual combat operations under U.S. command. This commitment reinforced the relatively small numbers of Joint Task Force 2 (JTF 2) that were already



there with a full battalion task force. Interestingly, that unit included a parachute company. As of the time of writing, the 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI) had transitioned from relatively benign guard duties around the Khandahar airport, to search and destroy missions that were killing Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters.

In addition to the peacekeeping-war-fighting policy shift in Afghanistan, the government has apparently also changed its policy with respect to elite forces. The previously cited Defence Common's Committee report, entitled *The State of Readiness of the Canadian Forces: Response to the Terrorist Threat*, was the first step in the now ongoing expansion of JTF 2 “into a special forces battalion similar to the Airborne Regiment” (*The Ottawa Citizen* [Ottawa] 8 November 2001). This report garnered support from all but one opposition party and that party argued that the recommendations did not go far enough. Canadian Alliance Member of Parliament Cheryl Gallant demanded the reinstatement of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. She even offered a solution to any potential negative public opinion; “If the Airborne name leaves a lingering bad taste, a battle group with a different name but the same responsibilities should be established” (*Ottawa Sun* [Ottawa] 18 October 2001). Perhaps not to be outdone, the chairman of the above Common's committee, David Pratt, has since “called for Canada and the U.S. to create an elite and fully integrated army brigade . . . modeled after the famed Devil's Brigade” (*National Post* [Toronto], 23 November 2001).

Although the government's fashion of the day appears to be elite forces, some objective comment is required. Granastien warns, “One slip and poll numbers can change quickly, and with them government [support]” (Granastien 2001). Illustrative of

this are the words of the Defence Minister in 1995, David Collenette. Despite an acknowledgement that problems with the Airborne had been addressed, he disbanded the unit with words that included, “I recognize that many changes in personnel and procedures in the Airborne have been made over the past year and that the people now serving are by and large dedicated professionals, however, I believe the problems of the regiment are systemic” (Speaking Notes Collenette [1995]). The lesson is clear, it may not matter whether you are effective and necessary, embarrass the government in the short term and support will quickly evaporate.

The government of 1995 showed it had little patience with the antics of the Airborne Regiment. Again, Hugh Winsor suggests this may be child's play in comparison with asking politicians to consider, in their support of elite forces, whether the ends justify the means. Although Winsor's definition of elite forces is somewhat skewed as he asserts that they “don't play by the Queensberry Rules or even the Geneva Conventions . . . and don't call back to the Department of National Defence before they pull the trigger” (*The Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 25 February 2002), it demonstrates the potential for public criticism, perhaps uninformed, that the government must be prepared to deal with. Certainly the definition of elite forces used in this study does not propose that elite unit operations would be above the law. Nonetheless, as per Huntington's described tension between the demands of security and the requirement to reflect the values of society, elite forces may present a dilemma for any Canadian government.

### The Public

In an *Ottawa Citizen* interview, Desmond Morton described the Canadian view of its military as one having “deep rooted suspicions . . . [and] a mixture of contempt and

feigned admiration” (*The Ottawa Citizen* [Ottawa], 12 December 2001). Although Morton is a well-respected military historian, these remarks may be overly cynical. Prior to the commitment of ground troops to Afghanistan, Martin Shadwick, a military analyst at Toronto's York University, offered a more balanced opinion when he stated that “Canadians [view] their country as a peacekeeping nation. . . . It's a mindset that's made its way deeply into the Canadian psyche and it's difficult to dislodge” (*The Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 21 November 2002). A longer term, more historically based perspective, can be found in a speech of Jake L. Granastien to the Canadian Defence Institute's 17th Annual Seminar, a forum solely devoted to the discussion of how the public viewed the Canadian Forces. Granastien described the relationship as one that goes through cycles, “When war comes . . . the citizenry demanded that every soldier be a super-hero warrior at once . . . and in peace social workers” (Granastien 2001).

If the public's perception of the army was ever seriously threatened by elite forces, it was with the actions of the Airborne in Somalia. Nonetheless, the perception may not have been reality. George Koch, in writing for the *Alberta Report* shortly after the Airborne's return from overseas, thought that views of the Canadian army as an “undisciplined force riven [*sic*] with fanatics and racists” were those “most prominently circulated by the Toronto Globe and Mail, a handful of CBC [Canadian Broadcast Corporation] reporters and the political left” (Koch 1993, 8). Although Mr. Koch may not have reflected the public's opinion of the Airborne with any sort of statistical validity, it was clear that the public was not totally against the paratroopers. In an interview with the last commanding officer of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, *Macleans'* Luke

Fischer, pointed out that as the unit was being disbanded, a poll at the time reported that “half of Canadians [thought] the wrong decision was made” (Fischer 1995, 18).

Even if during the Somalia affair, a large portion of the public was willing to accept elite forces in the Canadian army, it is also clear that these units must exhibit a certain acceptable behavior if they want to maintain that support. Granastien, again in his talk to the Canadian Defence Institute, spoke specifically to the Airborne's image with the public. “The gung ho, macho style of the CAR [Canadian Airborne Regiment] as it tried to emulate the worst of U.S. Special Forces style was profoundly un-Canadian, and the public, parliament and media saw it at once” (Granastien 2001). Although Granastien has oversimplified this to make a point, he raises the issue that there may be a requirement for an elite-unit military ethos that is specifically Canadian. Although little is known about any ethos that JTF 2 may have developed, the unit's recruiting video provides some insight. On viewing this tape, the reporter for *The Toronto Star* Valerie Lawton remembered the announcer saying, “There are no Rambos here,” a statement she understood as meaning there was a serious emphasis on maturity as a qualification for acceptance into JTF 2 (*The Toronto Star* [Toronto] 20 September 2001). In her 1999 investigation of the rites of passage and group bonding in the Canadian airborne, Donna Winslow suggested that if elite forces were to survive public opinion, they would be best served by adopting an approach of “quiet professionalism” (Winslow 1999, 431). An attitude of “do, not say” may be what the Canadian people would expect of their elite army units.

Since 11 September 2001, the pollsters have continuously sought to capture the public's view of the Canadian Forces (CF). Although they do not specifically address

elite units, they highlight a strong support for a military capable of more than just peacekeeping. In the immediate aftermath of the New York and Washington terrorist attacks, the CF's Director General of Public Affairs commissioned a survey entitled "Canadians' Opinions on the Canadian Forces and Related Military Matters." Its results indicated that "far more respondents were worried about terrorism, war and religious extremism than in previous years . . . 80 percent [saying] that Canada needs the CF a 'great deal' versus 70 percent the previous year . . . [and] 84 percent [saying] that the CF was doing a good job versus 81 percent the year before" (*The Maple Leaf* [Ottawa] 23 January 2002). For a self-described unmilitary nation, there is currently strong support for Canada's military. Equally interesting are the previous year's relatively positive statistics, views given in an environment with a far less obvious threat.

Although polls indicate support, Thomas Dimoff, as a member of the Defence Minister's 1997 Special Advisory Group on the Future of the Canadian Armed Forces, felt that from the CF's perspective, this backing was given little credibility, reinforcing Morton's view of "*feigned* [emphasis mine] admiration." His sense was that the average soldier felt that senior levels of government had little interest in the military and that both the government and the Canadian populace "do not appear to value the CF as an essential institution" (Dimoff 1997). Although his thoughts are those of a number of years ago, if indeed the public support is real, it will likely take time and increased funding to convince the service member who has long experienced something less.

As Canada began to deploy army units into Afghanistan, polls continued to measure the public's view. A January 2002 Ipsos-Reid poll reported that "66 percent of Canadians support [a] combat role for Canadian troops . . . deployed in Afghanistan [and]

53 percent agree that Canadian troops should participate with the U.S. in attacks against countries other than Afghanistan” (CDLS Message 25 January 2002). Again, support was shown in a Leger Marketing survey which indicated that “52.6 percent of respondents agreed Canadian troops should participate if the battle rages elsewhere [other than Afghanistan]” (*Canadian Press* [Toronto], 13 January 2002). Josh Rubin in his *thestar.com* column of 9 January 2002, published a number of electronic messages he clearly felt indicative of the public's change in mood. Included in these were likes of: “I'm proud that Canada will finally be putting soldiers in harm's way instead of simply backing the Americans and British who always seem to be the ones doing the fighting and dying in recent years.” “If we want to be heard on the world stage . . . we have to demonstrate that we are willing to take on a serious burden.” “It's time for a more aggressive Canadian army. . . . *Soft Power* is not for Canadian troops” (*The Toronto Star* [Toronto], 13 January 2002). Canada has probably experienced a sea change. As highlighted in Chapter 3, when countries are threatened and feel weak, elite military units are a popular option. Polls indicate there is a window of opportunity to establish a more aggressive Canadian army, one that could include elite forces.

### Military

The attitude of the Canadian army to the presence of elite forces in their ranks is far from certain. In writing for the *Canadian Military Journal*, Captain Thomas St. Denis' “The Dangerous Appeal of the Warrior” presents a case against their inclusion. His work contrasts the “warrior [which he says is concentrated in new ‘elite’ forces]” to the “soldier.” He is so strongly against any sort of elitism that he concludes that warriors “have no place in [the army]; indeed they are the anathema. In the end only soldiers are

the society's true defenders” (St Denis 2001, 37). St Denis' negative opinions of elite forces may be attributed to the way he defines a warrior. The characteristics he ascribes to elite troops seem to emphasize the likes of distinctive uniforms and insignia, synthetic traditions and cultures, and acceptance that they are outside the laws of war and limits of civility. Clearly these are not the characteristics of elite established by this study, but rather those that might be described as belonging to a “contrived warrior image” (St Denis 2001, 36).

Although personally against elite forces, St. Denis' view is that the majority of the Canadian army is not. It is his opinion that the Canadian army, “like its American cousin . . . promote[s] the warrior image among all its members [and] actually confer[s] a recognized warrior status on [the] most dedicated elites” (St. Denis 2001, 37). Although he provides no proof in support of this opinion, he likely expects his readers to be able to substantiate it themselves. The U.S. Army's latest recruiting advertisement, *An Army of One*, with its lone soldier running across a dramatic desert landscape, clearly attempts to leverage St. Denis' warrior image. Objectively, St. Denis also raises the potential positives of the elite soldier. He states that most Canadian officers would likely want to have soldiers with the elite qualities of individualism, nonconformity, the ability to make decisions on their own, and the desire to be more than just rank and file. He also does not underestimate the appeal an elite image holds to adventurous adolescents when it comes to recruiting.

Although St Denis' belief is that the Canadian army cannot accommodate real warriors, Lieutenant Colonel Bernd Horn represents the opposing position. This view, articulated in Horn's article “Burn the Witch,” was presented in chapter 2. There is no

need to repeat it here other than to point out an interesting anomaly. Although St. Denis and Horn have contradictory points of view, they both feel that their own view is in the minority! As Horn introduces his argument for special operations forces in “Burn the Witch,” he states that in the Canadian army there exists a “disdain,” “bias against,” and an “entrenched institutional criticism and resistance” to elite or special forces (Horn 1999, 26).

Although there may be some uncertainty as to the support of elite forces in the field grade ranks of the Canadian army, its commander, Lieutenant General Mike K. Jeffery, is more definitive in his support. In a March 2002 interview conducted by the author General Jeffery not only declared a “philosophical” support of elite units, but also went on to state that there was a need for both “special operations forces and orthodox elites, with the latter capable of operating in complex terrain” (Jeffery 2002). Of these orthodox elites, it must be noted that he did, however, quickly downplay the importance of parachute infantry. His emphasis was on the need to address asymmetrical threats through technology and the intellectual qualities of the soldier, in essence making a soldier-scholar more individually powerful. He thought this had been perfectly demonstrated in a recent magazine cover that showed a U.S. Army special forces soldier on his Afghan pony, integrating an understanding of local culture with the potential to use high technology tools and firepower. Overall his vision of Canada's future soldier seemed to embody the characteristics given elite troops in this research.

The above said, General Jeffery stated the problem with acceptance of elites in the Canadian army would be with Canada's perception of itself. He divided these thoughts into two areas. The first was Canada's image of itself as a “Pollyanna” nation, nobody's



enemy. He stated that no one was more surprised by the public's apparent support for Canadian troops hunting Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan than himself. Although not specifically discussed, this change was understood to be a direct result of Canadians feeling threatened at home, something they have not experienced in over a century.

The second area that General Jeffery felt important to emphasize was a Canadian bent to "small thinking." By this he meant that the public often believed their nation was not capable of doing great things on the international stage, that these were only the property of major powers. He included in this small-thinking population some elements of the military itself. To illustrate this he used the example of the government's, specifically Prime Minister Jean Chretien's, desire for Canada to be the lead nation in a 1996 humanitarian relief operation in Zaire. Despite military reluctance, the then Commander of the Land Staff (CLS), Lieutenant General Jean M. Baril, enthusiastically volunteered to take it on; his support of the prime minister was perhaps a factor when he was promoted and appointed Chief of the Defence Staff the following year. What this meant to General Jeffery was that the army must be properly trained, equipped, and prepared to be an effective instrument of government policy. If this meant investing in elite forces, so be it.

Even if Canadians as whole are not sure of their country's self worth on the world stage, it is clear Canadian politicians are and the military, despite resource limitations, must be prepared to project power. General Jeffery was realistic in his assessment of whether Canada could actually possess all the military capabilities of a nation like the U.S.A. (albeit on a smaller level) and explained his thoughts with the old adage of

“perfect is the enemy of good enough.” It was clear to the commander of Canada's army that not only must the military be prepared to contribute in a meaningful way, but the government expected it to shine. As demonstrated in Chapter 3 with the likes of the Dieppe raid and the 1st Special Service Force, this theme of contributing in a high profile manner has been a pattern historically associated with Canadian elite units.

### Summary

As Huntington and others have said, democracies must achieve equilibrium between military security and social values. When elite forces are involved, it may be potentially more difficult to balance this equation. This chapter looked at the attitudes of the Canadian government, public, and military towards elite forces in this civil-military relationship.

Canadian politicians have shown they want the privilege of offering counsel on the international stage, either for personal aggrandizement or the altruistic promotion of Canadian values. Since 1956 the army has provided this through peacekeeping. Although nearly following this same pattern with the Afghanistan ISAF mission, the government appears to be achieving its desired international influence through the first combat deployment of Canadian ground troops in over fifty years. Despite the army going to war, it is telling that the only tangible increase in government funding to the military has been to elite forces, essentially a commitment to double the size of JTF 2 (to allow war-fighting missions). There have also been less concrete commitments, such as calls to bring back the Airborne Regiment and create an elite U.S.-Canadian brigade, reminiscent of the 1st Special Service Force. Although there is currently increased

backing for elite forces, experts still warn that if these units embarrass the government, support is likely to be fleeting.

Although cynical observers may feel that Canadian public admiration of the military lacks credibility, polls report that not only is support currently strong, it was so even during fiascoes like the Somalia affair. Accustomed to its army being portrayed as peacekeepers, polls also confirm that the majority of Canadians supports involvement in combat operations in Afghanistan. Surprisingly, research was unable to uncover any direct evidence of a public aversion to elite units. Nonetheless, experts offer warnings that Canadians would expect a certain behavior from these troops, perhaps best summed up with expressions like “quiet professionalism” or “do, not say.”

Finally, the army view of elite units was less than clear. Both camps, those that supported elites and those that did not, felt they were in the minority and fighting an uphill battle. In either case, the advantages and disadvantages of the maintenance of elites were aired, the negative side accepting that there were many aspects to elite forces that could be leveraged. The most senior opinion in the army, Lieutenant General Jeffery's sided with the “pro” of the debate. Nonetheless, he provided some caveats. He agreed with the experts that the image portrayed by elite forces would have to be one of a quiet professional. Indeed he envisioned an army totally composed of soldier-scholars who espoused an ethos of quiet professionalism. General Jeffery concluded that in being an instrument of national policy, the army had to be prepared to project power when the government called; if that required elite units, he was supportive.

This examination of Canadian attitudes towards elite forces suggests that, although the window to their establishment has never been fully closed, it is now more

open than at any time in recent history. Canadians feel threatened and if the creation or strengthening of these types of troops provides additional security, then the army has the responsibility to get on with it. With this and the outcomes of the study's previous research in mind, the last chapter of the thesis draws final conclusions with respect to the proper place and role of elite forces in the Canadian army.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It appears we might be about to launch a fairly extensive process on determining how we want to organize the team. My concern is we haven't decided which league we want to play in yet.

Major General Lewis Mackenzie, *The Globe and Mail*

#### General

This thesis set out to determine whether there is a place for elite forces in the Canadian army. It did so based on an apparent disconnect between Canadian government expectations of a military capable of providing a wide range of policy options and an army conspicuous by its absence on the battlefields of the last decade. Trends in the strategic environment suggested that the relevance of the army in the future would be in even further doubt. In other words, conventional war seems unlikely, and Canada's army is structured conventionally and perhaps ill prepared to deal with the challenges it will face. Even while this study was being drafted, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and Canada's eventual decision to commit to combat both Joint Task Force 2 (JTF 2) and an infantry battalion task force underscore the significance of this research. The army must evaluate whether it has the right people, organization, equipment, and doctrine to apply military force when Canadians considered it necessary.

In times of need, especially when militarily weak, nations have sometimes resorted to elite forces. In attempting to determine whether elite forces were a panacea for the Canadian army, the critical importance of civil-military relations became evident. In fact, if any of the secondary questions posed became the main effort, it was whether

elite forces be could be accepted in Canada's liberal democracy. Academics point to a concern that an elite class of soldiers might actually threaten the government and the people they are charged to defend. This seemed even more significant for Canada, a country perhaps known more for being peacekeepers than war fighters, and one that had recently disbanded what many considered the army's only elite unit, the Canadian Airborne Regiment.

The purpose of this final chapter is to demonstrate that the primary question posed at the beginning of the study has been answered. This final part of the thesis summarizes outcomes, makes recommendations, recaps the contribution made to the knowledge base of elite forces, identifies the relationship the research has with previous studies, and finally proposes areas for further research.

### Outcomes

The thesis was designed so that the primary question, Is there a place for elite forces in the Canadian army? was answered by investigating four secondary questions. The first secondary question simply established a theoretical framework for the subject, emphasizing patterns and gaps in existing knowledge. Most importantly the study's definition of elite force characteristics was confirmed as:

1. Composed of volunteers
2. Small in size
3. Undergo a selection criteria and training of a high standard
4. Armaments and equipment differ from conventional forces
5. Assigned special missions, often very hazardous, because of their unique capabilities

## 6. Immediately available for use and rapidly deployable

In researching the next secondary question, What was the rationale for the apparent existence of elite forces in the Canadian army's past? the following conclusions were made. Despite the reputation Canadian civil leaders have for ignorance in military affairs, they have time and again been supportive of elite units. A number of circumstances seem to assist in this regard. When faced with an immediate threat to Canada, civil leadership understands the primary requirement of a government is to provide security for its citizens. The Canadian Airborne Regiment and JTF 2 both benefited from this. Enhancing the image of Canada on the world stage, thus its politicians as well, provides a further basis for the creation of elite units. Being seen as contributing to a larger international effort, with the inherent requirement to do so quickly, is also important. The 1st Special Service Force's origin, despite considerable arguments against it, is a case in point. Finally, from a civil leadership perspective, elite units that appear to fit a Canadian niche are more likely to receive support. Units that emphasized operations in northern climates provide a prime example.

Research into the history of the Canadian army showed a reluctance to embrace elite units by the military leadership. Nonetheless, it too can be convinced of the utility of these types of forces, given the right conditions. The realization that only elite troops can do a particular job is important. However, there is a persistent myth that the average Canadian soldier can do the job of other countries' elite. The 1st Canadian Corps in World War I demonstrated this, whereas Dieppe may have proven the opposite. Although the Canadian army possesses a number of elite characteristics, such as being composed of volunteers, small in size, and well trained, it is not elite. A continuing

theme, arising from always being the lesser partner in military coalitions, first with the British and now perhaps with the U.S.A., is the desire of the army to be considered a competent, professional force at least equal to those it serves with. So-called getting into the game, as seen with Canada's various airborne organizations, has provided evidence of this. At times, and under certain leaders, elites have been seen as a breeding ground for good morale, soldiers, and leaders; the caveat always being that troops serving in elite forces must rotate back to regular units for the benefit of the entire army.

The study drew further conclusions by looking at a third secondary question, Why do or do not nations like Canada maintain elite forces? through the comparative experience of Argentina, Australia, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden. These nations were chosen because they are in many ways similar to Canada. The expectation was that conclusions drawn from their experience could be applied to Canada with more validity than if they had come from major nations. Research indicated that, unlike Canada, all of these countries maintained both orthodox elite units and special forces. Support for these units seemed to emanate from the potential for elite forces to do the government's bidding. These units were accepted because they did what was expected of them and enhanced the image of the nation and, by extension, the politicians. This was a theme that resonated with the conclusions drawn from the earlier research into the history of elites in the Canadian army.

In all five nations, there was strong support within the militaries and the publics. Although military support was ascertained relatively accurately from policy and doctrine, determining the attitudes of the people was far more subjective. In terms of the militaries, only Argentina exhibited any reluctance towards elite units in its ranks. Even



in this case, it was only present in the most senior leaders because they had personally experienced a military revolt led by elite-force officers and noncommissioned officers. These countries' militaries generally seemed unconcerned about the traditional criticisms that elite units draw resources and the best people away from the conventional army. If these were concerns, then the military's bureaucracy had decided that the usefulness of elite forces outweighed any disadvantages. Although conclusions surrounding the support of these countries' populace were somewhat subjective, the most important deduction was that as long as elite forces behave themselves, the more special a unit, the more pride the country takes in it.

As stated earlier, in many ways the crux of this study's research focused on the final secondary question, What really is the Canadian (people and government) attitude/policy towards elite forces? Research used Huntington's *Solider and the State* framework for civil-military relations to examine the need for democracies to achieve equilibrium between military security and social values. As had been determined in the literature review, this equation was potentially more difficult to balance when elite forces were involved.

It was apparent that Canadian politicians have shown they want the privilege of offering counsel on the international stage, either for personal aggrandizement or the more altruistic promotion of Canadian values. Since 1956 the army has provided this through peacekeeping. With the commitment of ground troops to Afghanistan, it seemed that the government now felt it could achieve this international influence by other than participation in peace operations. The governments' commitment of JTF 2 and the 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the latter, which included a

parachute company, underlined the utility of elite forces. Despite the army going to war, it was telling that the only tangible increase in government funding and force structure to the military went to elite forces, essentially a commitment to double the size of JTF 2 (to allow war-fighting missions). Politicians and the media were also seen to be vocal in their calls to increase the orthodox elite of the Canadian army. These included suggestions to bring back the Airborne Regiment and create an elite U.S.-Canadian brigade reminiscent of the 1st Special Service Force. The conclusion made was that although the window to the establishment of elite units in Canada had never been fully closed, it is now more open than at any time in recent history. Finally, although there is currently increased government backing for elite forces in Canada, experts still warn that if these units embarrass the politicians, support is likely to be fleeting.

Although typically many have felt that Canadian public admiration of the military lacks credibility, current polls indicate very strong support. Even during trying times, like the Somalia affair, support for elite units, like the Airborne, remained surprisingly solid. Accustomed to its army being portrayed as peacekeepers, polls also confirmed that the majority of Canadians supported involvement in Afghanistan's combat operations. Research was simply unable to uncover any direct evidence of a public aversion to elite units. Thus, it was concluded that Canadians could accept these types of forces. Again though, experts warned that Canadians expect a certain behavior from their troops. It was concluded that elite unit conduct would have to be exemplary, perhaps best summed up with expressions like “quiet professionalism” or do, not say.”

Finally in looking at attitudes, the Canadian army's view of elite units was less than clear. Both camps, those that supported elites and those that did not, felt they were

in the minority and fighting an uphill battle. In either case, the advantages and disadvantages of the maintenance of elites were aired, the negative side accepting that there were many aspects to elite forces that could be leveraged. The most senior opinion in the army, Lieutenant General Jeffery's sided with the "pro" of the debate. Nonetheless, he provided some caveats. He agreed with the experts that the image portrayed by elite forces would have to be one of a quiet professional. Indeed he envisioned an army composed of soldier-scholars who espoused an ethos of quiet professionalism. Jeffery concluded that in being an instrument of national policy, the army had to be prepared to project power when the government called; if that required elite units, he was supportive. Overall in the examination of Canadian attitudes towards elite forces, it was apparent that when Canadians felt threatened, if the creation or strengthening of these types of troops provided additional security, then the army had the responsibility to get on with it.

### Recommendations

The overall outcome of this study is that if the Canadian Forces leadership deem elite army units are of use, the way is open to their expansion and/or creation. Concern of the Canadian government and people for the existence of elite army units is not the issue it maybe perceived to be. Given this conclusion, if this thesis is to be more than a theoretical investigation, it is logical to provide recommendations as to what might be done with this information. The question of relevance of the current army was introduced earlier as a primary motivator for this study. Essentially, does the army have the right people, organization, equipment, and doctrine to apply military force when Canadians consider it necessary? The following discussion proposes a structure that incorporates the advantages of elite forces, not as a full panacea, but as a useful method

of improving the army's ability to provide a wide range of policy options. Before this, it is, however, worthwhile recapping the factors discussed throughout the study as they might guide the introduction of elite army units into the Canadian army.

Elites as defined came in a number of guises, but this study focused on orthodox elites and special forces. Current Canadian doctrine refers to the area of orthodox elites as nothing more than conventional soldiers simply operating in unique operations and special environments. The Dieppe raid suggested that this approach was not sufficient. This study's literature review proposed a need for orthodox elites of three types: paratroops, amphibious commandos, and mountain troops. In addition to being capable in their unique operation and special environment, each category should be expected to be capable of airmobile operations (given the helicopters) and expert in complex urban terrain and northern climates. As General Allard envisioned, these troops would provide the government with an instrument of policy capable of rapid strategic deployment, preventative in nature or as a stopgap measure prior to the arrival of heavier forces.

As identified in the study, JTF 2 is about to transition from a solely counterterrorist unit to a special force capable of war-fighting missions. The restructure of JTF 2 will undoubtedly be classified. Nonetheless, from the study's research into the Australian Special Air Service (SAS) Regiment, it might be expected that JTF 2 would form multiple subunits that would include war fighting, counterterrorist, and training squadrons (companies in U.S. Army parlance) (Horner 1989, 452). The war-fighting squadrons, if they follow the SAS model, would be composed of troops (platoons in U.S. Army parlance) specializing in air, amphibious, mountain, and mobility operations (Ministry of Defence 1997, 1104). This version of JTF 2 would be capable of

international (vice domestic) counterterrorism and unconventional warfare, thus providing the government with an instrument of policy more suited to the current and expected strategic environments.

The study's literature review identified that there is often a natural link between the elite force categories of orthodox and special forces. This linkage is evident in the foregoing discussion, with for example JTF 2 air troops lining up with the parachute units of the orthodox elites, amphibious troops with commando units, and others. This linkage is primarily generated by the requirement for these units to be able to operate in these particular environments. However, from a Canadian standpoint there is an almost equally important consideration. The Canadian Airborne Regiment's first commander, Colonel Rochester, demanded that elite soldiers rotate back to the conventional army. This is designed to improve the standard of the conventional army, a repayment for giving up some of its best soldiers in the first place. A potential problem is that the soldier who had been challenged by employment in JTF 2, might not be interested in returning to be “number four [squad] member in the back of an armored personnel carrier” (Fitch 2002). The linkage between orthodox elite units and special forces would provide the opportunity for that JTF 2 member to return to similar employment in the more conventional army. If this was combined with promotion and the accompanying increased leadership responsibilities, the soldier's interest would likely be maintained.

This linkage also works in the other direction. As identified in the historical review conducted by this study, Canadian military bureaucracy has doubted whether the small size of the peacetime army could provide the necessary recruitment base for special forces. Recruiting for upper-end elite units normally involves a tough selection process

that starts with a far greater number of personnel than needed and then proceeds to weed out all but a select few. The small size of the Australian army precludes this process, and thus the Australian SAS have adopted a more “developmental” approach. In other words, “the Australian SAS [have] sought men with character and with demonstrated potential to serve in the regiment, and is willing to spend a little longer on training them” (Horner 1989, 432). Orthodox elite units can provide a developmental stepping stone for soldiers who might aspire to the upper end of the elite pyramid. For example, commandos could naturally move on to the amphibious elements of JTF 2. This technique would allow a relatively small recruiting pool to produce a better-than-expected number of special operators. This linkage is likely a necessity for the sustainment of elite units in the Canadian army.

A further factor is a concept that General Jefferys spoke of when he said, “Perfection is the enemy of good enough.” Although JTF 2 is apparently being funded to the necessary degree to enter the special forces arena, the establishment of parachute, amphibious commando, and mountain formations would appear prohibitively expensive. The creation of any force structure beyond the Canadian Forces' current funding envelope is unlikely. If orthodox elite units are to be stood up, they must leverage what exists. The Canadian army currently possesses three light infantry battalions, awkwardly placed within medium-weight brigades. A relatively simple reorganization has the potential to produce a stratum of orthodox elite units or formations.

In terms of airborne potential, all of the light battalions maintain a parachute company in their structure. This, combined with the existing Canadian Parachute Centre, at Trenton, Ontario, suggests that a formed parachute battalion is only a matter of

reorganization. The light battalion in central Canada, 3rd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment (3 RCR), could be the basis of a reformed 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion (it is not likely the Canadian Airborne Regiment name could be resurrected).

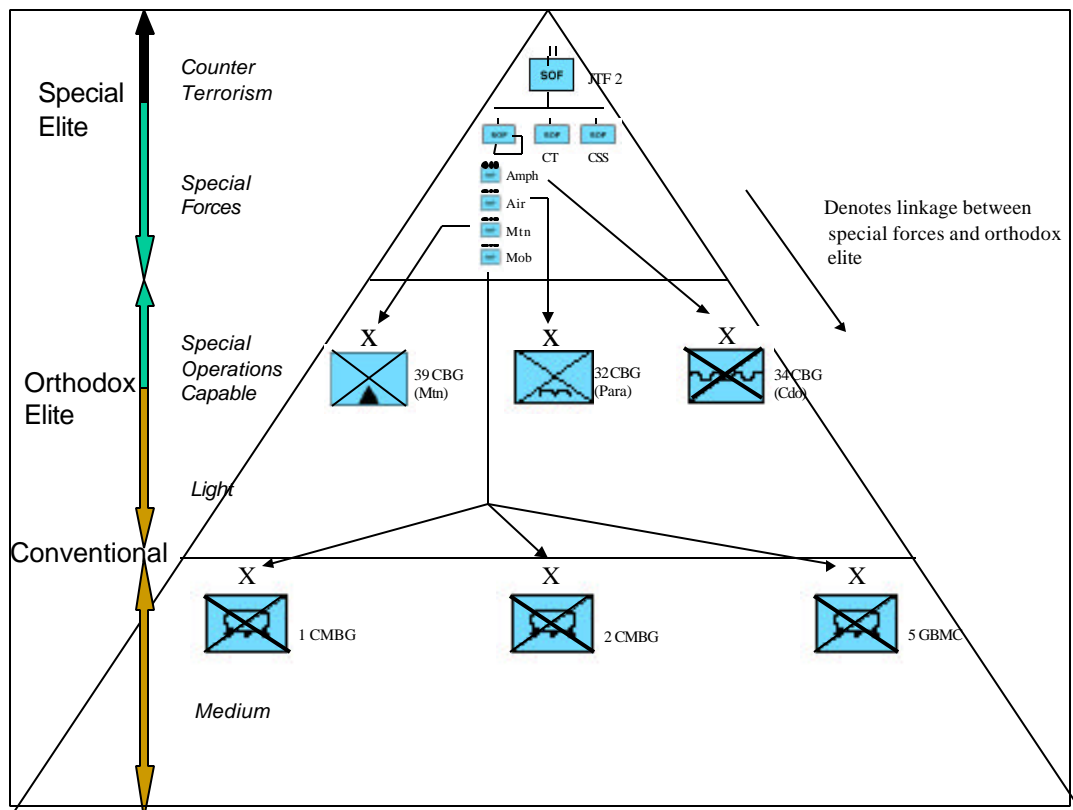
The 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (3 PPCLI), located in Edmonton, Alberta, trains regularly in mountain warfare due to its proximity to the Rockies. As Canadian doctrine suggests, "The use of helicopters [in mountain operations] . . . may have decisive importance" (Department of National Defence 1997, 8-27). It would be logical that 3 PPCLI take from its parent brigade that formation's utility helicopter squadron. As all regular Canadian brigades have this helicopter unit in their structure, the potential exists to centralize even more aviation in support of a mountain capability (forty-eight CH 146 Griffons are available from the three medium-weight brigades).

Although the first two types of orthodox elite units seem relatively easy to establish, the amphibious capability would be more difficult. The ability to do opposed beach landings, as exists within the USMC or the Spanish marines, is financially beyond the reach of Canada. That said, it is the navy's intent to replace its replenishment ships, auxiliary oil replenishment (AORs), with Afloat Logistic and Sealift Project vessels (*The Maple Leaf* [Ottawa], 25 July 2001). Not only are these ships envisaged to be able to carry a battalion task force worth of equipment (roll on-roll off), but they will also have large helicopter decks, a small hospital, a considerable command and control facility, and a significant logistic potential. Though not a landing platform helicopter (LPH), it would be capable of strategically projecting, commanding and controlling, and sustaining a light

battalion, in essence giving the army an amphibious capability and the government another instrument of policy.

Figure 1 outlines a structure that incorporates the preceding factors. Using the three existing light battalions for the basis of mountain, parachute, and commando total-force brigades creates the orthodox elite stratum. The light battalions would bring from their parent medium brigades their slice of combat support and combat service support. As mentioned earlier, the utility helicopter squadrons would also move to support the new orthodox elite brigades. This regular component would provide about one-third of these formations, with the remainder provided by the militia. Although a likely subject for further research, militia integration into the area of light forces would appear to be

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Elite Forces





easier than into heavier forces. Again using the preceding factors, figure 1 also shows a possible structure for JTF 2. The linkage between special elite and orthodox elite units is highlighted. Overall, figure 1 demonstrates that the theoretical work of this research has the potential to translate into an achievable structure.

### Contribution to the Knowledge Base

Although much has been written about elite forces, most of it is intent on glorifying the mystique of the particular force being studied. The literature review of this thesis determined that scholarly work in the area of elite forces, although limited, had increased in the last decade. Canadian specific material was restricted to the writings of a few select officers and students of the Canadian Forces College. The latter, although not unprofessional, were generally papers shorter in length and necessarily narrow in their focus, looking only at one particular area.

This study was broader in perspective, looking at the subject of elite forces with a more encompassing definition. The analysis was divided into three primary areas: history, other nations' experience, and Canadian attitudes. Research into the history of elite forces in the Canadian army broke no new ground. For the most part, its collection of material was not from primary sources. In determining the rationale for Canadian elite force's existence, most deductions had already been made by other authors.

In looking at the elite force experiences of five nations similar to Canada, a new contribution to the subject was likely made. The vast majority of writing on the subject, Canadian or otherwise, has focused on major nations' elites (France, Russia, United Kingdom, and U.S.A.). If conclusions had been drawn from these countries, they would have been relatively easy to discount in their applicability to Canada. In choosing nations

with a place in the world more like Canada's, deductions were expected to have more validity. The opportunity to interview senior officers, defense attachés, liaison officers, and staff college students from these five countries added a unique perspective to this thesis and a contribution to the overall knowledge base for the subject of elite forces.

Research into Canadian attitudes became the main effort of the study in many respects. The reasoning behind this was that even if the most compelling arguments for the operational necessity of elite forces were presented, if the government and people could not accept this type of soldier, the case was moot. Although surveys over the years have indicated support for the Canadian Forces, defense experts have generally felt these polls lacked credibility; if support was indeed high, why then was the defense budget so low? The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 provided a timely opportunity to more accurately gauge the Canadian attitude to things warlike. It became apparent, as perhaps never before, that when Canadian security is threatened at home, the population will demand an appropriate military force. This became evident in the polls, the commitment to increase the size of JTF 2, and calls for creation of other elite forces. Thus, this thesis also contributed to the knowledge base by studying the reaction to the War on Terrorism, particularly in the area of civil-military relations.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

It was necessary to limit this study to the four previously mentioned secondary questions. It was, however, apparent that the subject had not been covered in its entirety. A number of related topics could be pursued further.

Although this thesis focused on war fighting because of the Canadian army's absence from since Korea, there is a likelihood that army units will continue to be used in

peace operations. Journalist Mathew Fischer states that elite troops are appropriate for peace operations when he states, “. . . paratroopers. They [are] exactly the kind of tough, highly trained and motivated troops that Canada requires for the peacemaking missions that pop up with grim regularity these days” (Fischer 2002, 30). Research into the utility of elite forces in peace operations would be a worthwhile subject for further study.

General Jeffery, in addressing a Canadian army reserve restructure conference 21 to 24 March 2002, “Bridging the Gap: Reserve Forces and their Role in Civil Society,” stated that the Canadian army reserves needed to become more capable, effective, and relevant, concluding that “the status quo is not acceptable” (*The Maple Leaf* [Ottawa], 10 April 2002). The opportunity exists to effectively fold the militia into the establishment of elites, particularly in the area of orthodox elites. The advantages seem many. A lighter structure would be simpler to maintain, certainly from an equipment perspective and perhaps a training one. In addition, the mystique of paratroops, commandos, or alpine elites would likely provide a strong attraction for the age group that tends to join the militia. Objectively, in peacetime the reserves would not ever reach the standard of training of the regular battalion in the orthodox elite brigades, but probably much closer than they could a mechanized unit. The simple fact that one-third of the brigade would be composed of full-time soldiers would contribute to the formation's overall training standard. General Jeffery's, “perfection is the enemy of good enough,” would apply here. For example, the reserve battalions in the airborne brigade might adopt a tiered approach in their structure, one company fully paratroop qualified, the next only parachutists, and so on. Clearly, considerable scope exists for further research into a militia contribution to an elite force structure.

As mentioned in the literature review of this thesis, the regimental system of the Canadian army is described by CFP 300, *Canada's Army*, as being of critical importance. Criticism of this time-honored way of military organization is likely to raise hackles within the Canadian army to same degree as use of the word elite! Nonetheless, the regimental system may indeed be a form of military elites. Certainly the teaching of regimental histories attempts to invoke images of past warrior elites. As introduced earlier, Canadian youth may no longer relate to regimental names connected with a British or French colonial past. An association with special forces or the elites of airborne, commando, and the like may provide a greater affinity to today's youth. In all likelihood, there could be a melding of both concepts to the greater good. For example, *35 Groupe-brigade du Canada* could become *35 Groupe-brigade commando du Canada*. Within this brigade would be its normal regiments, Canadian Grenadier Guards (Commando), Black Watch of Canada (Commando), and the Royal Canadian Hussars (Commando). Again this is an area of possible further research.

The final area that may offer interest in terms of further research is the possibility of a wholly elite army. Ion and Nelson in their *Elite Military Formations in War and Peace* cite the historical example of the Roman Legions believing their army was all elite. More specifically they say, "The entire army forming an elite . . . can be detected in some modern-day forces such as the Canadian army or the United States Marine Corps" (Ion and Nelson 1996, 2). Given the tiny size of the Canadian army, it might be asked why the taxpayer should not demand a military with all the characteristics defined in this study as those of elite forces. Once again referring to figure 1, the existing medium-weight brigades of that proposed force structure, equipped with increasingly modern

equipment (*Coyote* reconnaissance vehicles, light armored vehicle III, and the new Tactical Command and Control System [TCCS]), might also be considered to be elite. This thinking was mentioned in Chapter 4's study of the Australian army. The equipping of the Canadian army to only a medium-weight level dictates that it will be less able to engage in attritional fights against heavier forces. Instead, when fighting as part of a coalition, it will have to be tasked with missions emphasizing the Canadian army's adoption of "manoeuvre warfare" (Department of National Defence 1997, 1-7) and traditional cavalry missions, such as covering force, flank guard, and the like. These missions are nonetheless challenging, befit a well-trained, specially equipped, and fully professional force. The possibility that the entire Canadian army could adopt an ethos that would leverage the positive aspects of military elites provides yet another area that might be further investigated.

### Conclusion

As General Mackenzie suggests in the opening quote of this chapter, the Canadian army must decide in which league it wants to play. The Canadian government is clear in its desire to have immediately available an effective military instrument, and the people of Canada, especially in the wake of 11 September 2002, have not indicated a willingness to invoke a veto on elite military units. Although the army is reluctant to talk in terms of elites, this thesis has shown that the window for their creation or expansion is open. Research indicates, that for the Canadian situation, concerns surrounding the establishment of elite forces hold much less significance than they have traditionally been accorded. There is a place for elite forces in the Canadian army, and the editors Ion and Nelson provide an appropriate final statement: "Properly used, . . . small highly trained

specialized units can give even a small state a deterrent power and military and political influence far in excess of that which the simple physical size of its armed forces might suggest” (Ion and Nelson 1996, 6)

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